Life and Teachings of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ

ITS RELEVANCE IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT



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INTRODUCTION

*B*OOKS on Seerah (Life of the Prophet) exist in great numbers. These are no doubt valuable books in their own right. However, one aspect of Seerah still remains to be highlighted. And that is, the relevance of seerah in the modern world. It is a subject, which, despite its great importance, has yet to be treated with sufficient thoroughness.

The books written on the subject of seerah give extensive coverage to miracles, wars and victories. Emphasis on these matters appeals to the conventional mind, but it has no appeal for modern man. These things do not address his mind. The modern man thinks in terms of science and not in terms of miracles. He thinks in terms of peace and not in terms of war. He is more interested in solutions to human, social and economic problems, rather than descriptions of political and military conquests. A thing becomes understandable to the modern man only when it is presented within the framework of reason rather than beliefs.

I have planned my book keeping in view this most urgent, present day requirement. I want to present a book, which is not just a repetition of the books already written, but one whose aim would be to fulfill modern intellectual requirements, focusing on the relevance of the Prophet of Islam in contemporary global context.

Another important thing, which is lacking in most of the books of Seerah is that they do not underscore the peaceful method followed by the Prophet.

A deep study of Seerah tells us that the Prophet invariably adopted the peaceful method unilaterally. He thus succeeded in bringing about a bloodless revolution in Arabia. Unfortunately, this aspect of Seerah has not been highlighted in existing biographies of the Prophet.

In present times, owing to certain global concerns, the propensity to study Islam has greatly increased. All over the world, curiosity has been aroused as to what exactly is meant by Islam.

What is urgently needed, therefore, is an objective, in-depth study of Islam—one which presents Islam as it actually is, uncompromisingly and without bias. It is in order to meet this need—in particular, to show how Islam can meet the challenge of violence—that I have undertaken the venture of presenting Islam as it is in the light of Prophet's life and teachings.

Farida Khanam

1. ARABIA BEFORE ISLAM

WITH an area of 1,20,000 square miles the land of Arabia is the largest peninsula in the world. It has the Red Sea to the West, the Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Adan to the south-east and the rivers Euphrates and Tigris and the Persian Gulf to the north-east. It thus occupies a unique position. It is situated in Asia, yet only the narrow Red Sea divides it from Africa and by just passing through the Suez Canal, one reaches the Mediterranean Sea and Europe. It is thus at the centre of three continents, yet it is apart from all of them.

Arabia being a very hot and dry country, one third of it is desert. It is strange that a land surrounded by water on three sides, and with only a narrow strip of land to the north, has practically no river of its own, except for small streams here and there, which soon dry up in the hot desert.

Rain too is scarce. The rains come in torrents in spring, but the water does not stay. It is lost in the sand as quickly as it comes. There being no dependable rainy reason, which is necessary for agriculture, this vast land, about a thousand kilometres wide and about the same in length, is neither fertile nor cultivable.

Yemen, the original home of the Semites, is the only exception, in that it is fertile and enjoys a rainy season. Besides this, the rest of the peninsula consists of barren valleys and deserts. Due to the lack of vegetation, life here can be only that of the desert. The

camel, the only means of transportation is indispensable, for a desert life demands continuous movement. The desert dwellers must continually go in search of pastures, which are scarce and thin, and soon cropped bare. The pastures turn green around spring, watered by springs which form in the wake of occasional rainfalls. In such an infertile country where no agriculture has ever been possible, the only produce is dates. In the context of this civilization, Yemen has always been very developed in terms of agriculture. Showing great intelligence the Yemenis invented ways of saving rain water from running down to the sea so that artificial irrigation could be carried out. Moreover, they built the famous dam of Maarib by changing the natural course of the water. This water is gathered in a 400 meter wide valley between two mountains by constructing a dam with gates at the narrowest point in the valley.

Then this water is divided into many streams and spread over a wide area of plains. It is almost like the Nile in the dam area in Upper Egypt. In this way they have contrived to have a controlled distribution of their water. The fertility of their land has gone on increasing and the people of Yemen have become very prosperous.

MAKKAH

When Hajira's infant son started crying for water she ran desperately between the hills of Safa and Marwah in search of water. She ran seven times when finally she discovered a spring of water gushing from the ground by the side of her son. It was this

spring which is known as Zamzam. Makkah is founded at this spring spot of Zamzam.

Both Makkah and Madinah were, and still are, islands in a sea of desert. These towns were initially inhabited by the descendants of the nomads, who still retained many of the desert born habits of their ancestors.

Situated in a valley, Makkah is one of the oldest cities in the world. It is a desert, with no vegetation, no date-palms.

There are some fertile spots in the desert, which are called oases. There are also springs of water here and there, although grass and palm trees grow. These springs of water are scattered all over the desert. Large as well as small clans settle around the oases.

Makkah since ancient times was an important centre for the caravans coming from the south with valuable merchandise. They brought gold, precious stones and spices from Africa to Yemen. From here it was taken to the markets of Syria, Egypt and many other places on the backs of camels.

The merchants travelled in caravans for the sake of safety. For in those days caravans were an easy target. Since these caravans passed through vast stretches of uninhabited deserts, it was easy for plunderers to rob them of all their merchandise.

At Makkah agriculture not being possible, the city thrived on commerce. Makkah became an important trading centre because of

the Sanctuary – the Kabah, to visit which people came from places far and near. Its geographical position was very good from the point of view of trade, it being situated at the crossroads of the routes from Yemen to Syria and Abyssinia to Arabia. So the nomads came to Makkah from all sides. By the 6th century, Arab traders had become very influential and controlled the trade from Yemen to Syria. Taif was also an important commercial centre but Makkah was more important because of the Kabah.

So Makkah became a religious as well as a financial centre. By the time the Prophet conquered Makkah, we find many influential traders who were adept at doing business with different parts of the world. Although Yemen was the most advanced province in the Arabian Peninsula because of its water resources and sound administration, Makkah being a religious centre wielded greater influence on this account. Makkah, a focal point of pilgrimage dating back to the origin of Arab history, owed its status to the Kabah, which had been built by Ibrahim and Ismail.

Everyone observed its holy months for religious reasons as well as on account of the special position it enjoyed with regard to trade, being the capital of the peninsula.

The Arabs of the North are considered *Arab al mustaribah,* "Arabized Arabs." The Qahtanis of the South are considered *Arab al Mutaarribah,* or tribes resulting from mixing with the *Arab al Aribah,* original, or true Arabs. From the Qahtanis descend the Arabs of ancient South Arabia, or "Himyarite" Kingdoms. The completely "true Arabs", descendants of Aram, son of Shem, son

of Noah, are called the *Arab al baidah,* “the lost Arabs”, their identity having been submerged in that of other peoples.

The progeny of Ismail were known as *Mustariba,* or naturalised Arabs, and they greatly multiplied. They were divided into many tribes and clans. The Quraysh, the largest tribe, descending from the Kinanah and Ismail, had several clans. They were settled in Makkah by an ancestor of renown called Qusayy, who displaced the previous inhabitants, the Khuzaah. The clans who lived in the vicinity of the Kabah were considered most honourable. These were called *Quraysh al Bitah* (the Quraysh of the Hollow).

The location of Makkah on important caravan routes across the Peninsula, and the prestige of the Kabah in the age of Ignorance (Jahiliyyah) gave it great advantages as a trading city. This is why the Quraysh became one of the richest and most powerful tribes. This, together with their descent from the Kinanah and Ismail, gave them claims to an aristocratic pre-eminence.

The Prophet Muhammad was of the Banu Hashim clan of the Quraysh, who lived in the vicinity of the Kabah and enjoyed great honour and prestige in Arabia. These clans were divided into families. Besides these Arabs there were also Christian and Jews who lived in Arabia. A large number of their population lived in Madinah.

In Arabia there are two different geographical types of soil markedly different from one another – the oasis and the desert. The inhabitants of Arabia naturally fall into two main groups: nomadic and settled people. The city dwellers settled in one place

and lived on cultivation because they knew how to till the land and grow corn. They engaged in commerce not only within their own country, but also abroad. But the Bedouins, being nomads, disliked the idea of a settled life and wandered from place to place with their families and belongings. Prof. Hitti in his book the *History of the Arabs,* writes: "The Bedouin is no gypsy roaming aimlessly for the sake of roaming. He represents the best adaptation of human life to desert conditions." (p. 23)

They lived in tents and possessed goats, camels and horses. They were continually on the move in search of pastures and when they halted temporarily they lived in tents or camps. They engaged for economic reasons in horse-breeding, hunting, camel raising, etc. They thought that these were the only occupations worthy of a man. They disliked agriculture, trade and commerce. In the desert the basic unit of life is not the state but the tribe. The Bedouins attach the greatest importance to total freedom for the individual as well as the tribe, but this was not the case with the city-dwellers. They attached importance not only to freedom but also to peace, security and prosperity. Another feature of tribal life, is the belief in absolute equality. All the members of the tribe are treated equally. This is because of the influence of the desert, with the freedom of its vast limitless expanses. If they had any injustice forced upon them, which they could not bear or confront, they left behind their pasture and moved on to another place where there would be no injustice—only freedom and equality. In times of conflict, they depended upon the sword. It was considered as a pre-requisite for the individual to be able to defend himself and his tribe.

The nomadic life is based upon stockbreeding, especially the breeding of camels. There is some rain in the winter season and then some vegetation comes up in the low-lying areas. These areas become a paradise for camels, as they provide the best pasture, but with the coming of summer the pasture vanishes. Then the nomads move on in search of other green areas in order to feed themselves as well as their camels. Then there are some wells, which provide water for the camels. The milk of the camels is the diet of the nomads along with dates, which are obtained from the oases. Cereals are not easily available. Only the rich can afford them. The oases that are found in Madinah are near the mountains. So there the date crop is grown. And in Taif, which has very fertile soil, cereals are grown. Madinah has the largest of the oases.

Ibrahim was the first to teach them the worship of one God. The Arabs followed the religion of Ibrahim for some generations, but their later generations tended to deviate from the straight path shown to them by Ibrahim and became idolators. At the time of the birth of the Prophet, the whole of Arabia had taken to idolatry. Some of the tribes worshipped stars and planets, some stone idols, and, thus the Kabah, which had been built for the worship of God became a centre of idolatry. It housed 360 idols, one for each day of the year. Hubal was the most honoured. Carved in red stone, it held seven arrows in its hand. Among the Arabs lots were drawn to decide all important matters.

The Quraysh were the most influential tribe in Makkah. Most of them were engaged in trade, and some of them were great traders. The name Quraysh is derived from a word which means to trade.

Since the Quraysh was the largest and most powerful tribe in Makkah, its chief was the most influential man in Makkah.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ARAB PEOPLE

Islam emerged in a region known as Hijaz, inhabited by the descendants of Ismael and Banu Kinanah. These people had access only to limited resources, limited habitable area, cattle, pasture and oases. Everything was in short supply. So they could afford to lead an extremely simple life.

Due to these constraints they often waged war, sometimes to take possession of the limited reservoirs of water and pastures. Nevertheless, these Bedouins had noble human qualities. For they lived very far from the artificial world of civilization. The atmosphere of nature served as a vast school of nature for them. They never led the artificial life of the cities and their life was devoid of all formalities. This extremely simple, austere life made them realists.

All this was responsible for producing in them the qualities which the Arabs call *al muruuwah*, manliness, which meant to them acknowledging the truth, speaking nothing but the truth, fulfilling promises, honouring obligations, supporting the oppressed,

boldness, noble character, patience, generosity and hospitality. When this high level of humanity was combined with the truth of Islam, they were enabled to perform great feats. It was this truth which has been thus expressed in a hadith:

> "Those who were good people in the days of ignorance will also be good people during Islam."

In ancient Arabia despite their battles, wars, conflicts and tensions, their vows of revenge, which went on for generation after generation, their mentality, their thinking, their aptitude for acknowledging the truth were fully preserved.

For instance, once in ancient Makkah two groups: were ready to fight. At this juncture, Abu Sufyan ibn Harb intervened and said to them: "If you waged a war so many people would be killed belonging to both the groups. So should I not tell you something better?" They agreed with him. Then Abu Sufyan said: "What has passed has passed, now you must make peace." Both the parties accepted his advice there and then and made peace. This was in spite of the fact that there were people who used to go on fighting for as long even as 50 years to avenge a murder or an insult or any injustice done to them.

Due to the paucity of economic resources, there were people who indulged in looting. But even these people were of a noble character. Once a Bedouin wanted to robe a woman who was all alone in her tent decked with jewellery. But he did not enter the

tent. He stood at the door and commanded her to take off all her jewellery and hand it over to him.

While the woman was taking off her jewellery, the man stood at the door with his back towards it, so that he did not catch sight of the woman while she was taking off her jewellery.

These Arabs had not been idol worshippers since ancient times. Idolatry was only a later introduction into their lives through foreign influence. The idols were imported into Arabia. So there was no ideology behind this idol worship. It was thus of a superficial nature, having no deep ideological or philosophical root. For instance, once an Arab wanted to take revenge for his father. So he went to an idol called Dhul Khalasa for divining arrows. But the answer that came from the idol was not in the affirmative. This enraged the Arab and, addressing the idol, he uttered these words: O Dhul Khalasa, had your father been killed you would never have uttered this falsehood that the oppressor should not be punished."

Similarly, another Arab led his camels to his idol Sad in order to seek its blessing. It was a tall idol, and was covered in blood due to the sacrifices made to it. On seeing this sight, the camels were frightened and ran away. When the Arab saw the flight of his camels, he hit the idol with a stone, abusing him:

> "May God destroy you. I had come to seek your blessings and you made my camels run away."

Of these ancient Arabs there were a sizeable number who were known as Hanif. These people were truth seekers and they shunned idolatry. They lived an aloof, social life. They used to say:

> "O, God, I do not know how You should be worshipped. Had I known, I would have certainly worshipped you in that manner."

These circumstances of the ancient Arabs and their moral qualities had a close affinity with Islam. These people true in nature, were as if potential converts of Islam. Therefore when the Prophet of Islam began his preaching in 610, these Hanifs took no time in responding to his call and became his devoted companions, Abu Bakr ibn Abi Qahafa being one of those Hunafa. What distinguished the Arabs from others was that they could not afford to reject a truth when it had become clear to them. That is why in the initial stage of the Prophet's call, due to some misunderstanding, a number of them turned against the Prophet Muhammad. But when finally they learned that what the Prophet was telling them was nothing but the truth, they took no time in entering the fold of Islam. There are a number of incidents in the books of Seerah to this effect.

Thus the sending of the Final Prophet was not without reason. It was a well-planned decision of God which He in His Own knowledge decreed. These Arabs were the living people who were selected by God to lend full support to His final Prophet, so that he might fulfill the divine mission.

2. THE LIFE OF THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD

THE Prophet of Islam, Muhammad ibn Abdullah, was born in Makkah in 570 A.D. in the tribe of Quraysh and died at the age of 63 in 632 A.D. in Madinah. The year of his birth is known among the Arabs as the year of the Elephant (*Aam al-Fil*) referring to the campaign of Abraham, an Abyssinian ruler, who had come to Makkah to destroy Kabah. Makkah was then inhabited mainly by the tribe of Quraysh. In those times, this tribe enjoyed great prestige all over Arabia and the neighbouring countries, for Makkah was a flourishing trade and religious centre.

Muhammad was still in his mother's womb when his father, Abdullah, died. After his birth, Amine, his mother, sent the baby to Abdul Mutely, his grandfather, who was in Kabah at that time. The grandfather was overjoyed at the news, for he loved Abdullah, Muhammad's father, very much. The grandfather gave him the name "Muhammad", meaning "the praised one." As was the practice of the Makkah nobility, he was handed over to a wet nurse, Kalimah al-Sadly, who belonged to the Banu Sad tribe. This custom is still practiced among Makkah aristocracy.

Kalimah nursed Muhammad for two years and a few months. She said that when he stayed with them, her family received all kinds of unaccustomed blessings. Having nursed so many children before, she noticed something 'different' or 'extraordinary' about

the infant Muhammad. These observations are recorded in detail by some biographers such as Al-Walid, Ibn Ishaq and Ibn Hisham.

Two years later, after the child had been weaned, Kalimah brought him back to his mother. But Makkah at that time was stricken with an epidemic, so Amine asked her to take him back to live in the pure air of the desert.

Thus Muhammad remained in the charge of Kalimah until the age of five. He learned Arabic in its purest form from this tribe. Muhammad used to tell his companions, "I am the most Arab among you, for I am of the tribe of Quraysh and I have been brought up among the tribe of Banu Sad bin Bakr.

Muhammad returned to his mother after five years of desert life. Then Amine took him to Madinah to meet her uncles, the Banu al-Ajar. She was accompanied by Umm Layman, her servant, on that trip. After a stay of a month in Bathrobe, Amine was on her way back to Makkah, when passing through a village called Abash, she fell ill and died there. She was buried in Abash. It fell to Umm Layman to bring Muhammad back to Makkah.

Therefore, the orphan Muhammad was taken care of by his grandfather Abdul Mutely, chief of the clan of Banu Hashim. He looked after him with great affection. As leader of the Quraysh, he used to sit on a cushion in Kabah, whenever Muhammad joined him, he was allowed to sit on that cushion. If anyone tried to stop him, his grandfather would say, "Leave him alone. By God, he is very important." (Ibn Hisham) Abdul Mutely died when Muhammad was eight years old.

Now the guardianship of Muhammad passed to Abu Talib, his uncle, who was a merchant. Once when Abu Talib was preparing to go to Syria on a trading journey, Muhammad expressed a keen desire to accompany him. Though he was very young to undertake such a difficult journey, Abu Talib was so full of affection for him that he could not refuse, and agreed to take him on the journey.

Their trade caravan halted in the city of Bursa in Syria. There was a Christian monk by the name of Bah rah living there in a monastery. He had read in the ancient books about the emergence of an Arab prophet. He recognised in Muhammad the signs of prophethood. He knew at once that he was the boy who had been destined to become the last of the prophets.

The monk invited the whole caravan to his monastery and asked Abu Talib, “In what way are you related to this child?” He said, “He is my son.” Bah rah said, “It cannot be. His father should not be alive.” Then Abu Talib informed him that his father was no longer alive. Bah rah advised him to return with his nephew immediately and to protect him from enemies. He said, “By God, if he is recognised, he will surely be harmed.”

Ibn Ishaq writes, “Muhammad entered his adulthood as if God Himself was protecting him from the widespread evils of the period of ignorance.” By this time he was well-known in Makkah for his good morals, gentle disposition and sincerity. In fact, he was called Al-Amin (trustworthy) and As-Sadiq (truthful) by his compatriots.

When Muhammad was twenty-five, a rich 40-year old widow, Khadijah bent Khuwaylid of the Quraysh tribe, entrusted him with the management of her business. She used to employ men to engage in trading on her behalf, and rewarded them with a share of the profits. Muhammad was so honest in all his dealings that she was deeply impressed by his virtues and expressed her desire to marry him. After consultations with his uncle, Muhammad accepted the proposal of marriage. Khadijah became his first wife and during her lifetime he had no other wife. With the exception of Ibrahim, who died in infancy, all his children were born to Khadijah. All his sons died in infancy. Of the daughters, Ruqaiyyah, Zaynab, Umm Kulthum and Fatimah lived long enough to accept Islam and migrate to Madinah with the Prophet.

When Muhammad was twenty-five, the Quraysh decided to rebuild the Kabah after a sudden flood had shaken its foundations and cracked its walls. The old structure was demolished and the new construction began. When the walls rose from the ground and the time came to place the famous Black Stone (Hajr al-Aswad) in its place on the east wall, a dispute arose among the clans as to who would have the honour of laying it in place. Each clan wanted to have the honour of placing the stone for itself. This dispute almost led to a civil war. No peaceful solution seemed possible.

At this critical juncture Abu Umayyah, son of Mughirah al-Makhzumi said to the Makkans, “Put it off till tomorrow, the man who enters the Kabah first of all in the morning will be our arbitrator in this dispute.” Everybody liked the idea. Men from

different tribes ran to the Kabah before dawn next morning. Each one tried to be the first to enter the House of God. But the first one to pass through the gate was Muhammad. On seeing him they all said, "There goes al-Amin. We shall agree with his verdict." Then he was asked to give his decision on the matter. He took a sheet of cloth and spread it on the ground, and placed the Black Stone in the middle of it and then he asked the chiefs of all tribes to hold different ends of the sheet and lift it up. They carried the stone to the site of construction. Then Muhammad picked up the stone from the sheet and set it in place. Thus a bloody clash was averted and the dispute resolved to everybody's satisfaction.

The life of Muhammad, may peace be upon him, before prophethood has been recorded in detail in several books. However, the following events are worth mentioning. A covenant known as the Alliance of Fudul (Hilf al-Fudul) had been entered into by three men, Fadal bin Fadalah, Fadal bin Vida and Fadal bin Harith. This was to ensure that no oppressor ever lived in Makkah. (Sirat ibn Hisham)

This Alliance ceased to exist after the death of its architects. Muhammad was 15 years of age when a civil war broke out involving the tribes of Quraysh and Qais. It is known as the Fijar War. In view of the widespread disturbances some people thought of reviving the Alliance of Fudul, to restore tribal harmony and ensure peaceful co-existence.

It happened that a trader from Yemen sold some of his goods to Aaas bin Wail, but he was not paid in full. He composed couplets narrating his misfortune and pleading for justice. This touched the pride of the Makkans, who gathered at the house of Abdullah bin Jud‘an at the instance of Zubayr ibn Abd al Muttalib.

After consultations, it was decreed that the Alliance of Fudul should be renewed. Everyone agreed to support the cause of the oppressed, whether or not they belonged to Makkah. They also resolved to force the oppressor to give the oppressed their rightful dues.

Twenty years before prophethood, Muhammad, may peace be upon him, participated in the Alliance. Twenty years after the prophethood he said, "I was present at the house of Abdullah bin Jud‘an at the time of the Alliance. I will not go back on it, even if I were to be given hundred red camels. Even after Islam has been established, I shall still be in favour of such treaty.'

During that period, there were other social treaties as well. Banu Abd al-Dar and his colleagues once gathered in the precincts of Kabah and vowed that they would not leave each other in time of need and they would not hand over anyone to other groups. Muhammad, may peace be upon him, did not rescind these treaties. However, he supported them. He even said that such treaties of mutual understanding and reconciliation have been further strengthened after the advent of Islam.

Before the prophethood, Muhammad, may peace be upon him, was engaged in trading. Abdullah bin Abi al-Hamsa said:

> "I had transacted some business with Muhammad, may peace be upon him, in those days and owed him money. I asked him to wait till I brought the required sum. When I reached home, I completely forgot about it. I remembered three days later and rushed to the spot where I had left Muhammad, may peace be upon him. He was there waiting for me."
>
> He did not upbraid me. All he said was 'You caused me a great deal of inconvenience. I have been waiting for you here for the last three days.' (Ibn Ishaq)

Abdullah bin Saib said that during the days of Ignorance, he was a partner in trade with Muhammad, may peace be upon him. Much later he went to Madinah and met him. Muhammad, may peace be upon him, said, "Do you recognise me?" He said, "Indeed, you were my partner in trade. And what a wonderful partner you were! You never indulged in deceit or quarrels."

Even before his prophethood, Muhammad used to shun polytheism, idolatry and rude behaviour. During his second journey to Syria, a dispute arose between Muhammad and a man in the course of a transaction. The man said:

> "I will accept your words if you swear in the names of Lat and Uzza. (The two of three main idols worshipped in Makkah, mentioned in the Quran 53:19-20).

Muhammad replied:

> 'I have never sworn in the name of Lat or Uzza till today. Whenever I come by chance upon Lat or Uzza, I avoid them and carry on."

With reference to such incidents, Ibn Hisham has rightly concluded that:

> "The Messenger of God entered his adulthood as if God was protecting and watching over him. And He kept him safe from the evils of the time because, He wanted to confer on him honour and prophethood. Thus he reached a position of supremacy over all the men of his tribe. Of all of them, he was the best behaved. He was the noblest among them by his lineage and was the best neighbour. He was unparalleled in forbearance. He was honest in what he said, and the most trustworthy. He refrained from misconduct. Ultimately, he began to be called Al-Amin (the trustworthy) in Makkah." (Sirat Ibn Hisham)

With his marriage with the wealthy Khadijah, Muhammad had access to all her wealth and property, he could expand his business as much as he desired. He had every opportunity to lead a successful and comfortable life. But with the passing of years he became less and less interested in business and devoted more and more of his time to the search of truth by means of reflection and meditation, instead of trying to establish himself in his society he

took to the desert. He would often go to mount Hira, three miles from Makkah. He stayed there in the cave lost in thoughts for hours. When his supply of food and water were exhausted, he returned home for provisions and went back to the solitude of nature for prayer and meditations. He sought answers to the mysteries of life. What is man's true role in life? What does the Lord require of us, as His servants? From where man comes and where will he go after death? It was to find answers to these perplexing questions that he betook himself to the stillness of the desert. With all these questions in mind, worldly gain and loss, comfort and distress did not concern him. He urgently wanted the answer to these important questions of truth. For nothing less than the truth could satisfy his soul. This phase of Muhammad's life is referred to in the Quran in this verse.

> "Did He not find *you* wandering and guide *you*?" (93:7).

He spent the whole of the month of Ramadan in the Cave of Hira. Finally after spending six long months in the cave, God turned in mercy to His Prophet, to guide him to the path of truth. At the age of 40, on February 12, 610 A.D., the Prophet was sitting all alone in his Cave. The angel of the Lord appeared to him in human form, bringing the first message from God. These words form part of the beginning of the ninety sixth chapter of the Quran. The Prophet's quest had finally been rewarded. God granted him guidance and chose him as His Prophet.

The angel said to him "Read."

The Prophet replied, "I do not know how to read."

Then Muhammad felt that his body was being squeezed hard. Then the angel released him and repeated the same command. Again Muhammad replied that he did not know how to recite. Then the angel again squeezed him and then released him for the third time and said: Read!"

Then a change came over him and he was able to repeat the divine words. Then Gabriel revealed to him the chapter Al-Alaq.

> "Recite in the name of *your* Lord, who created; who created man from a clot of blood; Recite, and *your* Lord is the most Gracious. It is He who has taught man by the pen that which he did not know." (96:1-5)

Muhammad recited these verses repeating them after the angel. Then he found that these words were written on his heart (Ibn Ishaq).

The Prophet trembled in fear of what he had seen and heard in the cave. The revelation was totally a new experience for him. He set off for his house immediately after the disappearance of the angel.

On reaching home the Prophet asked Khadijah to wrap him in blankets. He was shivering from high fever. When he calmed down, he related the whole incident to her.

Khadijah, being very kind and understanding tried her best to assure him.

She said:

> "By Him who dominates Khadijah's soul, I pray and I hope that you will be the Prophet of this nation. By God, He will not let you down. You are kind to your relations. You speak the truth, you help the poor and bear their burden, you honour guests and help those in distress. Surely God will never let you fail."

Khadijah then suggested that they should go and consult her cousin Waraqa ibn Nawfal, who had become a Christian hermit.

Waraqa heard the whole account from Muhammad and said:

> "I am sure the angel that descended on Moses has descended on you. You will be abused, and you will be pursued. I wish I could be alive to give you my support when your people will turn you out."

"Will they turn me out?" The Prophet found this difficult to believe. Waraqa replied that people have always turned against those who are recipients of God's messages.

The Prophet's wife Khadijah was the first convert to Islam. When the news of Muhammad's prophethood reached a freed slave, Zayd who was 30 years of age, and his cousin Ali, who was about eleven, both declared their faith in Islam. Abu Bakr, the Prophet's friend from childhood, was out of town. On his return he

heard of the new experience of the Prophet. People said to him that his friend had taken leave of his senses, believing that angels brought him messages from God. But Abu Bakr trusted the Prophet completely. Not for one moment did he doubt his veracity. He immediately went to meet the Prophet to find out the truth for himself. Abu Bakr asked the Prophet whether an angel had really descended upon him from God and had given him a message. The Prophet said "Yes," and without a moment's hesitation Abu Bakr professed his faith. He did not require any arguments to be convinced that he was telling the truth.

This small group of the Faithful were the first believers of Islam. In the first stage, the Prophet was asked to spread the message of Islam quietly to avoid arousing any hostility. Abu Bakr, being an influential merchant, was able to bring some of his friends, also rich merchants, into the fold of Islam. But the majority of the conversions took place among the weak and the poor.

In the second stage the Prophet received the command from God to spread the message publicly, but first to his own kin.

According to Arab custom, people used to ascend a hill when they had to announce some important news. So the Prophet, with his all-important tidings, climbed up on a hillock called Safa, situated near the Kabah. He then called out to the people, who all gathered around him. Then he addressed them thus: "If I tell you that a big army is hiding behind that mountain and is ready to attack you, will you believe me?" They all chorused, "Of course,

we will, for we trust you. We know you always tell the truth." Then the Prophet said:

> "God has commanded me to warn you, my kinsmen, that you should worship none but the one and only God. If you fail to do so, you will invite God's wrath. And I will not be able to do anything to help you, even though you are my kinsmen."

Abu Lahab, the Prophet's uncle, became very angry and said:

> "Woe to you on this day! Did you assemble us for this?"

Some remarked that he had gone mad. Soon they all dispersed without caring to give any thought to the words of the Prophet.

There was one main reason for the Quraysh to oppose the Prophet, and to keep him from spreading his message. Makkah was a centre of pilgrimage because of the Kabah, which housed 360 idols of the neighbouring tribes and nations. Since Islam believed in only one God, the Quraysh feared that once the concept of one God became popular, the tribes would stop visiting the Kabah to pay homage to the idols. This would deprive them of the respect they commanded as guardians of the Kabah. Besides, the prosperity of Makkah depended mainly on these idols. People in great numbers from the neighbouring tribes used to visit Makkah all the year round to make offerings to the idols. This brought prosperity to Makkah, for trade flourished side by side with the pilgrimage. Makkah being a desert, no agriculture or economic resources existed there. The Kabah was their only asset. But, all

the Makkans were not hostile. There were people who gave serious thought to the message of the Quran and gradually began to accept Islam. About 200 people from Makkah as well as the neighbouring settlements entered the fold of Islam.

The Quraysh who enjoyed the Makkan leadership considered the teachings of the new religion an insult to the religion of their forefathers. In Islam they saw a danger to their own leadership. Such leaders as Abu Jahl, Abu Lahab were the most hostile to the Prophet. They began to give serious thought to the matter. Islam was fast gaining ground, so they thought that they could not afford to postpone taking action. This menace, they had to nip in the bud.

The chiefs of different clans gathered to discuss this matter. They all felt that if Abu Talib did not come in their way, they would have no difficulty in finding a solution to this problem. So they all came to Abu Talib to tell him to stop Muhammad from spreading his message.

They warned him, “Tell Muhammad to stop spreading his message, or you will abandon him. If you fail to do so, you should be ready to suffer for the deeds of your nephew.”

Abu Talib, an old man, felt that he would not be able to resist their wrath. So he told Muhammad what the Quraysh chiefs had said to him and then added, “My dearest nephew, look to your own safety, and to the safety of your uncle, and do not cause me to carry a burden I cannot bear.”

For a while the Prophet stood motionless. On the one hand, there was his old uncle weakened by the people's opposition, and on the other hand, there was the responsibility to proclaim the truth till his last breath. And the only source of strength was his faith and his conviction in the truth. So he decided to discharge his duty whatever the cost. In a firm and calm voice, and with tears in his eyes, he said:

> "O uncle! By God Almighty, I swear that even if they were to place the sun on my right and the moon on my left, I would not give up my mission. I must go on carrying it out until I die."

Abu Talib, touched by the sincerity and force of the words uttered by his nephew, remained motionless for a while. Then he turned to the Prophet and said:

> "My nephew, go your way. Do your duty. Let my people turn against me. I am with you. No one shall harm you as long as I live."

OPPOSITION INTENSIFIED

When the Quraysh saw that the pressure on Abu Talib had failed, they decided to make life unbearable for the Prophet and his followers. Slaves, the weakest sections of the society, were the worst sufferers. Their masters beat them brutally and some of them were beaten to death. But they suffered all this patiently. Abu Bakr spent much of his wealth on freeing these slaves.

Even the wealthy Muslims were not spared. They were also persecuted. Their own relatives turned against them. After the death of Abu Talib and Khadijah, people were emboldened to persecute the Prophet. They threw rubbish on him as he passed through the streets. They spread thorns in his path. They made noises when the Prophet stood up in the Kabah to pray.

The Makkans did all that they could to turn people away from the Prophet. But in spite of all their efforts Islam continued to spread. Some of the powerful men of Makkah accepted Islam. Hamzah, the Prophet's uncle, Umar ibn Al-Khattab, who was famous for his bravery, and Abu Dharr Ghifari were among them.

The Makkan chiefs were more enraged than before. They made life so difficult for the Muslims that a number of them migrated to Abyssinia, an area nearby, with the Prophet's permission. At first fifteen men and women migrated to Abyssinia. Slowly, the number reached 83.

This safe haven of the Muslims made the Makkans all the more angry. They sent two of their men to Negus, the king of Abyssinia. These men brought him precious gifts and requested him to turn these 'ignoble' people out of his land as they had forsaken their forefather's religion to follow a new religion. Negus sent for the Muslims and asked them to explain their case. Thereupon Jafar, son of Abu Talib, briefly explained to him the teachings of Islam and recited some portions from the Quran from the chapter called 'Mary'. Negus was very impressed and he said:

> "Go forth into my kingdom; I shall not extradite you at all."

Then he turned to the Makkans and said:

> "Go away, I cannot give up these people. They are following the true faith."

With the passage of time, the Makkan chiefs became more and more bitter. They felt that it was Muhammad's clan, the Banu Hashim, headed by Abu Talib that was responsible for all this misery and that if they had given up Muhammad, all his activities could have been stopped without delay. They made it known to the Banu Hashim that if they did not surrender Muhammad to them, they would have to suffer the consequences.

The tribes of Makkah entered into an agreement. They agreed to cut off all dealings with the Banu Hashim. No one was to sell anything to them. The agreement was signed and hung up in the sacred Kabah. This was the seventh year of prophethood.

This period of boycott was one of great hardship for the Banu Hashim and the Muslims. While this ban was in force, Abu Talib, the chief of the Banu Hashim, had to take refuge in a narrow valley, which came to be known as Abu Talib's Pass. For three years, the Prophet and all his relatives lived in this valley. Many of the Muslims joined them. All supplies to the valley were cut off. The Banu Hashim had to live on the leaves and roots of trees.

Finally, certain kind-hearted Makkan leaders took pity on the Banu Hashim. They tore to pieces the agreement hanging in the Kabah so that the Banu Hashim could come back to their homes. But soon after this, Abu Talib the Prophet's uncle, died. His health had deteriorated during the three years of hardship. Although Abu Talib had not accepted Islam, as head of his clan he had protected the Prophet from his opponents.

After his death, Abu Lahab, another uncle of the Prophet, became head of the Banu Hashim. He was the bitterest enemy of Islam and Muslims. He made it clear to the Quraysh that Muhammad no longer enjoyed his clan's protection. In those days, it was impossible for an individual to survive without the protection of his clan.

Khadijah, the faithful wife of the Prophet, also died soon after the ban was lifted. Both these deaths took place in the 10th year of prophethood.

The loss of Abu Talib and Khadijah saddened the Prophet, for they had been great sources of strength to him. It was their deaths that made the enemy bold enough to persecute him. One day when the Prophet was praying in the Kabah, Abu Jahl put a piece of cloth round his neck and twisted it hard. He would have strangled the Prophet had not Abu Bakr rushed to his help in time.

Day by day, the situation worsened. So the Prophet decided to go to Taif, a neighbouring town, 40 miles from Makkah to spread the teachings of Islam. He was accompanied only by his servant

Addas. He spoke to the leaders of the town and invited them to accept Islam. They paid no heed to his message. They were such evil people that they did not stop at that. When the Prophet was leaving the town in a dejected state, he was chased by street urchins instigated by these chiefs. They abused him and threw stones at him as he walked out of town. They continued to pelt stones at him, until the cover of the darkness of night came in before them and the Prophet. He stopped on the way in an orchard to rest. He was badly hurt, bleeding profusely. Yet he only prayed for their guidance. He did not curse them. In all humility he addressed God in these words.

> "Lord! Forgive these people, for they know not what they do."

In the tenth year of Prophethood the angel Gabriel came to take the Prophet on the miraculous journey to the heavens known as Miraj. They first went from Makkah to Jerusalem, the Prophet riding on a winged horse. At Jerusalem, the Prophet said his prayers in the Temple of David, where all other prophets joined him in prayer. Then he ascended to the heavens still accompanied by the angel Gabriel. God granted an audience to His messenger. It was on this blessed occasion that the Prophet received God's commandments including the prayer to be said five times daily. The Prophet then came back home. All this took place overnight.

There are two views about this heavenly journey. Some hold that this ascension was made by the Prophet's soul, while others hold that it was made by his body. According to Umm Hani, the

body of the Prophet was never missed from his bed. Rather God caused only his soul to travel. Aishah, the Prophet's wife, was also of the same view. A third opinion is that Miraj from Makkah to Jerusalem took place in the flesh, while from Jerusalem to the heavens it took place only in spirit.

ISLAM SPREADS TO YATHRIB (MADINAH)

The Prophet used to convey the message of Islam to the people coming from outside Makkah. In the eleventh year of prophethood six men from the tribe of Khazraj of Yathrib (later came to be known as Madinatun-Nabi, Prophet's city) accepted Islam during their pilgrimage to Makkah in 620. The following year twelve more men from Yathrib accepted Islam. This time they took an oath pledging allegiance to the Prophet. This oath is known as the First Pledge of Aqabah, named after the Aqabah pass, at Mina, near Makkah, where they had been sworn. They requested the Prophet to send Musab bin Umayr, a companion of the Prophet, to Yathrib to convey the message of Islam to the inhabitants. There the divine message was immediately well received, and within a year, a number of people converted to Islam as a result of the preaching of Musab ibn Umayr.

In the thirteenth year of Prophethood, seventy two Muslims from Yathrib came for the Hajj. On behalf of their people they invited the Prophet to make Yathrib his home. During the pilgrimage they also took the oath, known as the second pledge of Aqabah. These men from Yathrib, of the tribes of Aws and Khazraj,

pledged to protect the Prophet from his enemies. For all this sacrifice on their part they wanted only one assurance from the Prophet: that when the Prophet had gained power, he should not leave them and return to Makkah. The Prophet replied:

> "You have that assurance. I am yours and you are mine."

Now the Muslims began to emigrate to Yathrib in large numbers to escape persecution at the hands of the Quraysh. Only the Prophet, Abu Bakr and a few Muslims were left in Makkah.

This infuriated the Quraysh for Islam was now strengthening its root in Yathrib. They were greatly alarmed that their enemies were gaining a firm foothold. There was nothing more dangerous than that. So they resolved to remove the danger once and for all. They said:

> "Kill Muhammad and Islam will die with him."

As the Makkans plotted against his life, God sent His command to the Prophet to leave for Yathrib. First of all he called Ali and gave him the deposits of the people and asked him to return it to the depositors. The young men with whom the Quraysh had planned to carry out the assassination collected on that fateful night to put their plan to action. But God had another plan. And who can overrule the plan of God? Accordingly, the Prophet made Ali lie in his bed while he himself left the house at midnight.

The Prophet had already informed Abu Bakr, his closest friend, of the plan to emigrate, to be conducted in total secrecy. They left

Makkah before dawn, riding on two camels, which Abu Bakr had kept ready to carry them across the desert. About five miles from the city they took shelter in a cave called Thawr.

When the Makkans learnt of the Prophet's escape, they were mad with rage. They offered a prize of one hundred camels to anyone who captured Muhammad. A number of horsemen raced out into the desert. One of them even managed to reach the very mouth of the cave of Thawr. Abu Bakr was stricken with fear lest they harm the Prophet. But the Prophet reassured him, saying:

> "Fear not. We are not two only in this cave. There is a third—God." (Bukhari)

The Prophet and Abu Bakr lay hidden in this cave for three days and three nights. On the fourth day they came out and continued the journey along with Abdullah ibn Urayqit, their guide, and Amir bin Fuhaira, Abu Bakr's servant.

Suraqah bin Malik was one of those horsemen who, wanting to earn the reward of a hundred camels, went in hot pursuit of the Prophet.

After a continuous ride of a day and a night the Prophet and Abu Bakr stopped to rest. It was then that Suraqah, who had sighted them on the road to Madinah, managed to come close to them. But when he spurred on his horse, it stumbled and fell bringing Suraqa down also. He made two more attempts to go near the Prophet but the same happened each time. Now Suraqa was frightened. He realised that none can harm the Prophet, for he

was under divine protection. He begged for mercy. The Prophet forgave him.

THE PROPHET ARRIVES AT MADINAH

After six days' journey the Prophet reached Quba, a village three miles from Madinah. At that time the people of Madinah had been waiting impatiently for his arrival. The Prophet stayed for two weeks in Quba, where he built the first mosque of Islam.

Each morning people used to come out of the city and watch the road from Quba. At last the great day arrived. He set off for Madinah on a Friday morning. When he entered the town, he found that all the people, men, women and children, had turned out to receive him. The women stood on the house-tops and sang songs of joy.

They had all lined both sides of the street to receive him. When the Prophet entered the city, everybody wanted him to be his guest. The more zealous held the reins of the camel and wanted the Prophet to dismount in front of their doors and enter their houses. But the Prophet refused politely and said:

> "Leave my camel alone. She is under the command of God; she will stop where God wants her to stop."

It finally stopped at a site, which belonged to two orphans of the Banu Najjar tribe. The Prophet dismounted saying: "It seems that this is where God wants us to stop."

He then bought this land to build a mosque and some houses on it. After settling this matter, the Prophet asked who lived nearest to the site. Abu Ayyub Ansari said that his house was the nearest and requested the Prophet to be his guest. The Prophet stayed in his house for about seven months. In the meantime, his house was built.

From the day the Prophet came to Yathrib, it came to be called Madinatun-Nabi or “The City of the Prophet.”

The Prophet entered Yathrib on the 17 September 622. This year was later designated by Caliph Umar as the first year of the Islamic era, for this event was considered to be the most important in the history of Islam.

BROTHERHOOD OF ISLAM

The first problem faced by the Prophet was that of the Makkan refugees. They had neither homes nor money. Most of them had been well to do in Makkah, but they had left everything there. So the first important thing for the Prophet was to settle them in their new surroundings.

The solution to this problem was found in the concept of brotherhood in Islam. The Prophet collected the Muslims and suggested that one Ansari (Madinan) Muslim and one refugee Makkan Muslim should become linked together as two brothers.

They immediately accepted the suggestion of the Prophet. Each Ansari took one Makkan Muslim as his brother. This bond between

the two became even more powerful than a blood relationship. The Ansari gave his Makkan brother half of everything he possessed—house, land, money and other belongings.

THE PROPHET'S MOSQUE

The next most important task for the Prophet was to build a mosque. This mosque was built on the land he had bought from the orphans. It had mud walls and a roof of palm leaves. Huts were built adjacent to the mosque for the Prophet's family.

A platform with a thatched roof was built in one corner of the mosque. Poor people who had no home or family lived here. They spent their time in worship and prayer. They were fed by those Muslims who could afford to do so. They also sometimes earned their living by collecting wood from the jungle and selling it in the market. These people came to be known as *Ashabus-Safa*, people of the bench. Abu Hurayrah, also one of *Ashabus-Safa*, and the most constant attendant of the Prophet, related more traditions of the sayings and doings of the Prophet than any other.

Yathrib was inhabited mostly by the tribes of Aws and Khazraj. Both tribes rapidly entered the fold of Islam. Some Jewish tribes also lived in the city. They were rich, owned orchards and were very powerful.

Now the Prophet turned his attention to the important task of establishing friendly relations with various tribes. The Banu Qaynuqa, Banu Nazir, Banu Qurayza, the Jewish tribes, were

neither friendly nor hostile towards the Aws and Khazraj. But now that the Aws and Khazraj had accepted Islam, it was necessary to make a new treaty to determine each other's rights and duties in the new scenario, with the Prophet as their leader.

This pact dictated by the Prophet granted full religious freedom to the Jews. The Muslims and the Jews had to live in peace and amity together as brothers, helping one another in times of need.

After the conclusion of this treaty, Islam found a safe home in Yathrib.

THE PROPHET'S FAMILY

The Prophet had a large family. He married twelve other wives after the death of Khadijah. Most of them were widows, two of his wives were Jewish, one was a Christian.

In those days, polygamy was prevalent. Islam restricted the number of wives to four. In those days, when men were often killed in battle the women who were left behind had to be looked after. So taking several wives was like taking helpless refugees into one's home. They were treated kindly and generously. Muslim men were encouraged to look after the widows of friends who had died in battle, give them separate homes, and treat them equally in every respect.

The Prophet's wives shared his pious way of life. They made great personal sacrifices, bearing patiently with all kinds of hardship

in the path of God. So they became known as the mothers of the faithful. All the Prophet's sons had died in infancy. But four daughters borne by Khadijah survived infancy, grew to adulthood, married and bore children. They were Fatimah, Umm Kulthum, Ruqayyah and Zaynab.

JIHAD

The Prophet was a man of peace and reconciliation. He urged his companions to ask God for peace. For the Prophet's main task was the communication of the divine message to the people. And an atmosphere of peace and goodwill was essential to perform this duty. But the Quraysh did not allow him to work in peaceful conditions. When they saw that the Muslims were becoming increasingly stronger, they resolved to wage war and crush them altogether.

THE BATTLE OF BADR

The Quraysh marched to Madinah with a thousand strong army. They camped at Badr, about eighty miles from Madinah. It was the month of Ramadan, 2 A.H. On hearing the news of the enemy camping at Badr, the Prophet marched out of Madinah at the head of an army of 313 Muslims. There were few horses and the Muslims had no armours. The Makkans, on the other hand, were well armed and had 300 horses and 700 camels.

The battle, in which the Makkans were seriously outnumbered, began on Friday the 17th of Ramadan. The fighting lasted only a few hours, during which the Prophet prayed continuously for divine succour. God then sent angels to help the Muslims who emerged victorious. The Quraysh suffered a total rout.

The defeat, however, did not teach the Quraysh a lesson, but further enraged them. Determined to wipe out the blot of this humiliation, they now began preparations for a second attack, on a much bigger scale. They raised an army of more than 3000 warriors and mad with revenge, marched to Madinah led by Abu Sufyan.

The Battle of Uhud took place in 624 A.D. The enemy numbered 3000 while the Prophet's men numbered only 700. But with God on their side, the Muslims successfully repulsed the attack. The enemy started retreating, leaving behind large quantities of booty. Victory was eminent for the Muslims, when forty archers whom the Prophet had assigned to the hillside to guard the pass, saw the retreating army and thought that if they remained on the hill, they would lose their share of the booty. Therefore most of them abandoned their posts. This left the way open for a counter attack.

When Khalid bin Walid, still a non-Muslim, saw the pass undefended, he led his men behind the hill and killed the few archers who still stood guard. Then he fell upon the Muslims from the back. Seeing this, the fleeing Quraysh leaders turned back. The Muslims were thrown into utter confusion. The Prophet himself

was wounded. But the Muslims stood like a solid wall of stone around the Prophet, and managed to repulse all attacks with superhuman courage. Many fell dead and several wounded. They had gone to the extent of sacrificing their lives to save the Prophet from the enemy onslaught. Slowly the enemy was beaten back.

The Quraysh lost 14 men, while the Muslims lost 70. Among the dead was Hamzah, the Prophet's uncle. The Prophet grieved over the loss of this brave soul. With deep sorrow the martyrs were buried and the Muslims came back to Madinah.

The Quraysh knew at heart that the Muslims would have emerged victorious, had not the fateful mistake of a few Muslims had turned their victory into defeat. So for two years they made no attempt to invade Makkah.

THE BATTLE OF THE TRENCH

The enemies and hypocrites had been plotting all this while. They managed to bring together all the opponents of Islam. So they were able to assemble a mighty force of 24,000. In the fifth year of Hijrah, this large army started marching towards Madinah. The Prophet came to know of the Jewish plot to exterminate the Muslims. He consulted his companions. One of them, Salman Farsi, a Persian, suggested that a defensive trench be dug around Madinah. This strategy was used by the Sassanids on such occasions. Three thousand men worked for twenty days to dig it.

The allied forces of 10,000 marched to Madinah under the command of Abu Sufyan. The Madinans numbered only 3,000. The Makkan cavalry were stopped by the trench. However, they had plenty of provisions and supplies so they decided to lay siege to the city.

On the 27th day of the siege, a cyclone hit Madinah. For three days and nights the storm continued bringing torrential rain.

All the tents were blown away and the provisions became unusable due to the rain. Dissension in the army was gradually growing. Discouraged, the Quraysh abandoned the siege.

TREATY OF HUDAYBIYYAH

The Prophet felt that war was not the solution. Therefore he adopted another strategy. Guided by a dream, he left for Makkah to perform Umrah accompanied by 1400 companions. He camped at Hudaybiyyah, a short way from Makkah. It was a completely peaceful march. But the Makkan leaders objected to it. They felt that their prestige was damaged by the fact that the very people who had been expelled by them from Makkah should come to the city again and perform the rights of Umrah openly and in such large numbers.

Now the Prophet halted at Hudaybiyyah and began negotiating for peace with the Makkan leaders. The Quraysh finally agreed to sign a peace treaty. However, at the Prophet's suggestion, a clause was included in it, specifying that for the next ten years no war

would take place between the Muslims and the Makkans. By the terms of this treaty the Muslims were to go back without visiting the Kabah. They were to come again the following year and stay in Makkah for just three days.

The treaty appeared to be a victory for the Quraysh, for the Prophet had unilaterally accepted all their conditions. But it soon proved to be otherwise. Now there being no danger of war, people were able to mix freely with any tribe they liked. This gave the non-Muslims an opportunity to have a closer look at Islam. During this period of free interaction, Islam became a subject of general discussion. The call of Islam spread rapidly. The Arabs, impressed by the virtues of Islam and began to enter its fold in large numbers. Within the next two years the number of Muslims greatly increased.

CALL TO THE WORLD

Now that peace prevailed, the Prophet took full advantage of the opportunities it afforded him. He sent his companions with letters to the rulers and kings the borders of whose kingdoms were contiguous with, or close to Arabia. The companions used to deliver these letters to the rulers. – Iran, Byzantium, Abyssinia, Egypt and Syria, amongst others. These letters contained the fundamental teachings of Islam and the rulers were invited to accept Islam.

Some of them, like Negus, the ruler of Abyssinia accepted Islam, while others rejected it, but they accepted the letters graciously and sent presents to the Prophet. Only the Emperor of

Iran, Khusro Parvez, tore the Prophet's message apart in his arrogance. He considered it below his dignity to accept such a letter. When the Prophet received this news, he said: "The Emperor of Persia has himself torn his Kingdom into pieces." This prediction was fulfilled during the rule of Caliph Umar, when Iran came under Muslim rule.

FALL OF MAKKAH

Two years after the signing of this treaty, it was violated by the Quraysh. The Prophet then announced that the peace agreement had been revoked. Subsequently, on the 10th of Ramadan, he left for Makkah accompanied by 10,000 companions. This march was conducted in complete secrecy. Only when they encamped a few miles from the city did the Makkans come to know of their arrival. The Makkans were completely taken by surprise. Faced with this numerical strength, the Makkans found themselves helpless. Therefore they conceded their defeat without any resistance. Makkah was thus conquered without any armed encounter. The Muslims had strict orders to shed no blood. The Makkans were told that they would be safe if they kept indoors or took refuge in the Kabah or in Abu Sufyan's house.

After the fall of Makkah the Kabah was purified of all the idols, which had been placed in it. Then Bilal, the Negro companion of the Prophet, went up on to the roof of the Kabah and gave the call to prayer (*Azan*). Then the companions said the thanksgiving prayer, led by the Prophet.

PARDON FOR ALL

The Makkan leaders sat in the compound of the Kabah. They were, without exception, the worst types of criminals. Therefore, even if all of them had been put to death, the punishment would have been fully justified. But the Prophet, being of a noble character, did not take any action against them. He unilaterally declared a general amnesty, saying: "Go, you are all free."

The Makkan idolaters could hardly believe their ears. This generous treatment meted out to the fallen foe won all hearts, including those of the most bitter enemies of Islam. After the conquest of their hearts, they had no choice but to embrace Islam. All the insolent Makkans surrendered and joined the Prophet in his mission as his companions. All opposition had just vanished.

BATTLE OF HUNAYN

The fall of Makkah was not taken kindly by all the tribes. The Banu Thaqif and the Hawazin, who lived between Makkah and Taif, were highly perturbed by the developments in Makkah. Sensing the danger to their independence and supremacy, they turned aggressive and collected a huge army. This army was encamped in the valley of Hunayn, to which a narrow pass was the only entrance.

Expert archers hid themselves behind rocky crags. The Prophet arrived with an army of 12,000. The Muslims filed between the narrow rocky walls of the pass, panicked under the sudden heavy

rain of arrows from the hidden archers. About 11,000 of the 12,000 strong Muslim army turned and fled, for they were not at all prepared for this sudden attack. But the Prophet and some of his close companions showed no signs of panic, reposing their entire trust in God. God sent His succour as promised. Thus, despite the initial setback, the course of battle was altered. The Muslims won an extraordinary victory. Six thousand members of the Hawazin tribe were taken prisoner. They were proven war criminals. According to the prevailing custom, they should all have been put to death. But the Prophet pardoned them all and set them free without setting any conditions.

This extraordinary and unexpected amnesty impressed these insolent people so much that they all entered the fold of Islam. After the conversion of the Hawazin tribe, the rebel Thaqif tribe of Taif lost courage. Within one month they all surrendered and embraced Islam.

FIRST HAJJ UNDER ISLAM

The first Hajj under Islam took place in the ninth year of Hijrah. The Prophet himself did not lead it but sent Abu Bakr in his place. The ninth year of Hijrah witnessed a rapid spread of Islam. Representatives of tribes inhabiting far off parts of Arabia poured into Madinah. They had a two-fold purpose—to convert to Islam and to establish relations with the newly formed Islamic state. These delegations came in such large numbers that it became known as the year of delegations. In this way one after another all the tribes of Arabia entered the fold of Islam.

THE FAREWELL PILGRIMAGE

After having consolidated the power of Islam in Arabia, the Prophet set out to perform Hajjatul wida, his Farewell Pilgrimage. It was the last year of his life. He left Madinah for Makkah accompanied by Madinan Muslims. When the news spread that the Prophet was going to perform the pilgrimage, various tribes living in Arabia began pouring into Makkah.

Therefore when the Prophet of Islam performed his first as well as his last pilgrimage, he was joined by 125,000 Muslims. During this pilgrimage the revelations about the rules of the Hajj were given to him. These are followed by all Muslims to this day.

When the Prophet arrived at Mount Arafat he imparted some teachings to the people present on that occasion. These are preserved in the form of the 'Final Sermon'.

During the Sermon of Arafat the last passage of the Quran was revealed:

> "Today I have perfected your religion for you, and I have completed My blessings upon you; and I have approved Islam as your religion." (5:4-5)

This proved to be his last visit, that is why it came to be called the "Farewell Pilgrimage." Only three months after his return to Madinah he fell ill and, with the consent of all of his wives, stayed in the house of Aishah. He had fever and headache. He remained ill for about two weeks and breathed his last on 12 Rabiul Awwal

10 A.H. He continued leading prayers till he became too weak to go to the mosque. But before his death he said his last prayer in the Masjid-e-Nabawi and made Abu Bakr, his closest companion, the Imam of this prayer. This was a clear indication that he wanted Abu Bakr to succeed him as the leader of the believers.

The Prophet died in the room attached to the Masjid-e-Nabawi. He was buried in the same place. Later when Abu Bakr and Umar died, they were also buried to the right and left sides of the Prophet.

3. THE CONCEPT OF WORSHIP IN ISLAM

WORSHIP, according to the Quran, is the sole purpose of the creation of man. The Quran says:

> "I have not created jinn and mankind except to worship Me." (51:56).

There are a number of verses in the Quran, which elaborate on how the prophets were sent to this world for this very purpose. (16:36, 2:21, 4:36, 21:25). According to Islam, all individuals should lead lives of worship and devotion to God.

The dictionary defines worship as bowing before someone and humbling oneself. "The essence of worship is fearfulness and humility," says Lisan al-Arab. The dictionary meaning of the word is also its canonical meaning. Abu Hayyan says: "Prayer means humility: this is the consensus of religious scholars" (*al Bahr al Muhit*, Vol. 1, p. 23). That is why the Qur'an uses the word "arrogance" as the antonym of worship.

Although worship's real connotations are humility and fearfulness, when the word is used in relation to God, it also includes the concept of love. Ibn Kathir writes: "According to the dictionary, worship stands for lowliness… In the Islamic Shari'ah it is used to express a condition of extreme love coupled with extreme humbleness and apprehension." (*Tafsir al Qur'an*, Vol. 1, p. 25) Iman Ibn Taimiyah says: "The word *'Ubudiyat* (adoring

enslavement) expresses a mixture of extreme humility and extreme love." (The Pamphlet on *Ubudiyah*, p. 28) Hafiz Ibn Qayyem also writes. "There are two components of worship: extreme love and extreme humility" (*Tafsir ibn Qayyem*, p. 65).

The essence of worship then is to adopt an attitude of lowliness and humility before God. In the Qur'an, this is expressed by different words, such as *Khashiyyah, Tadhurru, Ikhbat, Inabat, Khushu, Khudu* and *Qunut*, etc. To worship God means utter prostration of oneself before Him. The Being before whom the act of worship is performed is no tyrant but an extremely kind Being, to whom we owe limitless blessings. So this expression of lowliness before Him is tinged with love.

The concept of *Ibadah* entails that one should first realise his relation to God. The relation of man to God is the relation of the humblest creature to an extremely beloved Being. Man shivers in awe of God but, at the same time, he draws closer to Him in great expectations. For the fear of God is not of the kind produced by the sight of a fearful object. It is rather a feeling of extreme hope and extreme apprehension. It is a situation of love and fear in which man runs towards the very Being he fears, in the hope of receiving from Him His divine blessings.

According to the Quran, the essence of worship is to be God-fearing.

> "O men, serve your Lord who has created you and those who have gone before you, so that you may guard yourselves against evil.' (2:21)

When a believer has developed this strong attachment to God, he reaches a state of deep realisation enabling him to experience the presence of God. The Prophet has been reported as saying:

> "Pray to God as if you are seeing Him." (*Mishkat*, Chapter on Faith).

According to this saying, the most sublime form of worship is that in which the worshipper is so lost in thoughts of God that he finds himself very close to Him. His apprehension of the divine presence should be as keen as if God were actually visible. This state of psychological proximity is the most sublime achievement of prayer. All rites of worship are aimed at arriving at that state.

So the aim of our worship is to enter into a relationship with God "and" reach God. To find God thus in this life is the highest reality of religion.

THE IMPLICATION OF WORSHIP

What God desires of man, first and foremost, is that he display humility in His presence. It is this attitude, which is called worship. But man has not been created in a vacuum. He has rather been placed in a world full of diverse circumstances. If the believer has truly surrendered his being before God, then this spirit will manifest itself in his dealings with everyone he comes in contact

with. This submission, a manifestation of true worship can be divided into two categories: the individual and the collective.

Individual obedience means obeying God in those matters which are related to his personal life. It covers all those commandments which pertain to morals and dealings with man, like speaking the truth, keeping one's promises, being honest and trustworthy, upholding justice, being a well-wisher of all, etc.

> All this involves surrendering to the will of God in one's personal affairs. (33:36).
>
> This individual obedience is an obligation for every believer. He has to mould his external life entirely on the pattern indicated by God. (2:208)

The second category of commandments, called *Ita'ah* (submission), may be termed social commandments. These can be carried out only when the whole of society is willing to obey them. That is why such commandments have always been sent by God only when the believers had already established a political organisation among themselves. Because only then are they in a position to enforce such social laws. That is why social laws are addressed to any Muslim society, which is invested with authority, rather than to individuals who have no political power. We find that during the Makkan period only the basic part of the Shariah was revealed. The rest of the Shariah continued to be revealed according to the circumstances. These laws are directed only at those groups of believers who are in a position to carry them out. As we learn from the Quran:

> "God does not charge a soul with more than it can bear." (2:286).

FIVE PILLARS OF ISLAM

In order to enable man to successfully carry out this life-long, life-giving duty, the Quran and Hadith have designed a preparatory action plan known as the Five Pillars of Islam.

After belief in God and the Prophet, four practices enjoy the status of pillars of Islam—fasting, prayers, *zakah* (almsgiving) and the *hajj* (pilgrimage to Makkah).

Abdullah ibn Umar said that the Messenger of Allah said:

> "The foundation of Islam has been laid on five principles: to bear witness that there is no God but Allah and that Muhammad, may peace be upon him, is His Prophet; to offer prayers (*salah*); to give alms (*zakah*); to perform the Hajj and to keep the fast during Ramadan."

These five principles form the pillars of Islam. Just as a house stands on pillars, so does Islamic faith on these tenets. However, the performance of these rituals is not all that is desired. What is much more important is the true spirit in which these are performed. Without the spirit the form is meaningless. All these different observances–faith, prayer, fasting, charity, pilgrimage–are not mere rituals, but are the source of receiving the choicest divine

blessings. Faith, the most important of all is, in essence, belief in the truth of divine realities.

Prayer is an exercise in physical and mental prostration before God, aimed at banishing all notions of personal greatness. Fasting teaches one to be steadfast in one's trust of God. Charity entails the recognition of others' claims upon one, so that one shall not forfeit one's own share in God's bounty. The Pilgrimage serves to unite God's servants around their Maker.

THE SPIRIT OF FAITH

One is required to testify to one's faith, in the oneness of God and the prophethood of Muhammad. But its spirit lies in its acceptance. Through this article of faith a man accepts God and all His attributes. He also accepts that God sent Muhammad, may peace be upon him, to this world as the eternal guide for all mankind. If this reality reaches one's heart, it becomes a part of one's being. One's heart opens to the truth and reality.

There are seven things, which are essential for a Muslim to believe in. These come under the heading of *Iman Mufassal*, a detailed declaration of faith. They are to believe in one God, in His angels, in His revealed Books, in all of His messengers, in the Last Day (the Day of Judgement), in Taqdir (the doctrine of predestination which means that everything good or bad is decided by God) and in the Life after Death.

A true believer is required not only to testify to his faith by word of mouth (*Shahadah bil Lisan*) but also to accept it with all his heart and soul.

THE SPIRIT OF SALAH

The spirit of these daily five prayers is humility. One who bows before his Creator in the true spirit will be devoid of pride and ego. The prayers are prescribed for five times throughout the day—at daybreak, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset, and evening. The prayers consist of recitations from the Quran and glorification of God. These are accompanied by a sequence of movements: standing, bowing, kneeling, touching the ground with one's forehead, and sitting. Worshippers face the Kabah while offering the prayers.

Muslims have been advised in the Quran to be steadfast in their prayer (29:45) for prayer keeps away indecency and evil. One who performs his prayer in its true spirit cannot become forgetful of God after his prayer is over. The actions of prayer are a manifestation of the fact that one's heart is full of fear and love for God. Therefore, if prayers are said in their true spirit, one's prayer will surely fend off indecency and evil and, by purifying the worshipper's soul, serve to bring him closer to God.

THE SPIRIT OF FASTING

The Arabic term for fasting is 'Sawm' which means to abstain. It is aimed at detaching oneself from the world and devoting one's

life entirely to God (73:8). The outer sign of fasting is the abstention from food from morning till evening. But in its essence it is to withdraw from all worldly attachments, and reduce all mundane necessities to a minimum.

This fasting aims at weakening the material aspect of man and strengthening the spirituality in him. Man is made up of body and soul. Just as the body requires physical nourishment, so must the soul be nourished spiritually. To be sure, fasting results in physical discomfort. But God has nothing to gain from causing human beings unnecessary trouble and man has to satisfy his material needs; but if he wants to discover the truth it is essential, at least for a few fixed days, to retire from the material world in order to develop the spiritual part in him, so that he will be able to attain spirituality.

THE SPIRIT OF ZAKAH

Zakah, in reality, is a form of sacrifice meant to underlie those ethical values, which are known in Islam as *Huququl Ibad*, that is, fulfillment of one's responsibilities towards others. Thus the spirit of Zakah is the service of mankind.

It requires an annual contribution of 2.5 percent of an individual's wealth and assets, not merely a percentage of his annual income. In Islam, the true owner of things is not man but God. People are given their wealth as a trust from God. Therefore, Zakah, far from being viewed as "charity," is an obligation—for

those who have received their wealth from God—to help the less weaker members of the community:

> "...the poor, orphans, and widows, to free slaves and debtors, and to support those working for the cause of God." (9:60).

(For further details see the chapter on social welfare).

THE SPIRIT OF HAJJ

The root meaning of the word, "Hajj" is to set out or to make a pilgrimage. Canonically it has come to refer to the act of worship performed annually in the month of Dhul Hijjah, the twelfth month of the Islamic calendar.

At least once in his or her lifetime, every adult Muslim who is physically and financially able is required to make the sacrifice of time, money, comforts, becoming a pilgrim totally at God's service.

The pilgrims wear simple garments, two seamless white clothes for men and a dress that entirely covers the body, except the face and hands, for women. These coverings symbolise purity as well as the unity and equality of all believers.

Some important rituals to be performed during the Hajj are as follows:

— *Tawaf* (circumambulation), i.e. going round the Kabah seven times.

— *Saee:* the pilgrims undertake a brisk walk between Safa and Marwah, two hillocks near the Kabah.

— Standing on Arafat: the pilgrims gather at Arafat and pray to God throughout the day, reciting the Talbiyah. This standing on the 9th day of Dhul Hijjah is very important. According to tradition, standing at Arafat is the culmination of the pilgrimage.

It was at Arafat that the Prophet delivered his farewell sermon to his people from the Mount of Mercy, a hill in the middle of the plane.

Among all Muslim acts of worship, Hajj holds a pre-eminent position. In one Hadith, the Prophet called it "the supreme act of worship." But it is not just the rites of pilgrimage that constitute this importance; it is the spirit in which Hajj is performed. Hajj has been prescribed so that it may inspire us with a new religious fervour. To return from Hajj with one's faith in God strengthened and rekindled – that is the hallmark of a true pilgrim. Hajj reigns supreme among all acts of devotion. Just as the Sacred Mosque in Makkah has a station above all other mosques, so the worship that is performed there as part of the pilgrimage stands head and shoulders above all other acts of devotion.

4. THE CONCEPT OF THE STATE IN ISLAM

IN order to explain the concept of the state in Islam, I would like to quote some of the relevant verses from the Quran.

> Say: “O God! Lord of Power, You give power to whom You please, and You take away power from whom You please.” (3:26).

Some points are made here very clearly: one being that the actual possessor of power is God and that it is He who grants power on earth to whom He wants and who takes away power from whomsoever He wants. So the whole matter in this regard rests with God. If someone receives power, it is not due to his own effort: it is given to him by God alone. Similarly, when power is taken away from him, it is done by God alone.

Thus the dominance or subjugation of any group is ultimately for God to decide. According to this verse, no human being has any power whatsoever. The theory that comes to light is that political power is totally governed by God, just as the entire universe is running in accordance with the divine plan. It is like saying that God alone is the controller of the universe and that He alone has the final word as to who is going to be given political power. Just as God exercises full power over the setting and rising of the sun, so also has He full power over the granting of political ascendancy.

This is an incontrovertible fact. There is another verse in this connection, which throws further light on the subject:

> "And He will bestow upon you other blessings which you desire; help from God and a speedy victory." (61:13).

In this verse "other blessings" mean political power. This has been characterised as something secondary. When we take this verse in its literal sense, it transpires that the status of political power has a secondary rather than a primary position in Islam. Primary position is given to the purification of the self through intellectual and spiritual development.

Another point made clear in this verse is that the receiving of political power depends solely upon divine succour. Victory and defeat apparently belong to the human world, but both are totally governed by God. From these verses it emerges clearly that political power is a promise from God, and not a target. That is, it is not something that Muslims should aim at, for they can receive it only by divine edict.

Another point that we learn from this verse is that power is not granted to any group simply because of its struggle to that end, but rather on the fulfillment of two specific conditions. The Quran makes it clear that true faith and virtuous character alone are the deciding factors in receiving political power.

What is meant by faith is that the group who is to be the recipient of political power should have undergone the intellectual

and spiritual revolution called Iman (Faith) in the Quran, that is, they should evince absolute trust in God, total submission to the Prophet, full conviction on the existence of the angels, of the Hereafter, of hell and heaven; in short, they should display a keen desire to mould their lives in accordance with the spirit of the Quran. When such qualities of faith are produced within a group, the time will come for it to be considered by God for the grant of political power. Good deeds necessarily entail full conformance to the divine commands regarding worship, moral character and the upholding of justice. In the words of the Quran, our lives should be wholly dyed in God's hue. When this quality of good character has been developed in the majority of the people only then is political power given to that group by God's command.

Then there is another verse in this connection, which throws further light on the subject. This is in the context of the granting of political power to the Prophet Solomon. The words uttered by the Prophet Solomon after receiving power was *'Leblanc'* (This is meant as a test). These words tell us that political power is given in order to try us. The test contrives to separate the grateful from the insolent servants of God (27:40).

Thus, according to the Quran, the nature of political power in this world is exactly the same as that of other things. That is, when an individual is given wealth, offspring or anything of a material or worldly nature like success, all that is designed to test him. All these blessings serve as test papers. Thus political power is also a test paper.

Therefore, according to the Quran whoever receives power should realise that power is given to him in order to test him. It is not something to take pride in, nor is it merely a matter of being a gift from God.

The concept of the State that emerges from these verses of the Quran make it clear that political power is not the target or goal of our activities or actions. Rather it is the result of some other set of actions. That is to say, according to the Quran, the objectives of our struggle should be faith and good character. These conditions have to be fulfilled and only then can a group be blessed with political power by God, if He so desires. We might say, by way of analogy, that the position of faith is that of the seed and the position of power is that of the fruit.

According to the Quran, the whole matter can be likened to a tree. The position of the seed in this example is that of action and the position of the fruit is that of receiving the reward of that action. In this way those who sow the seed of Faith and good deeds may receive political power as a gift from God.

We must then consult the Quran and Sunnah as to what is the structure of political power in Islam. In the Quran, the first principle that comes before us is in the form of approbation of:

> "those who conduct their affairs by mutual consultation." (42:38).

This verse alludes to a basic principle of conduct so far as the political structure of Islam is concerned. This shows that the

political system of Islam is based on mutual adjustment, this being one of the most important social principles of Islam, which is equally desirable both prior to and after receiving political power.

It is noteworthy that this verse enjoining Muslims to settle their affairs by consultation was revealed in Makkah, whereas Muslims received political power only in Madinah after their migration. The revelation of this verse in Makkah shows that this principle of consultation is an all-time social principle. The practical proof of this principle at all times is made clear by the fact that whenever any social problems arose, the Prophet would always call his companions for consultation.

Therefore we find in the books of Seerah (the Prophet's biography) a number of examples, which begin with these words:

"O people, give me advice."

After the death of the Prophet in Madinah in 632, Abu Bakr Siddiq was appointed as a leader of the believers, and first successor of the Prophet. Events tell us that the Prophet was of the opinion that this task of leadership should go to Abu Bakr, but he never nominated the latter, nor did he prepare a will.

There were, however, certain indications during his lifetime of his wishes. For instance, the task of congregational prayer is such as performed only by the head of the State. That is why the Prophet of Islam used to lead the prayer himself. For, according to Islam, the Imam of the mosque should be one who is the leader of the political institution, or he could be one appointed by the head

of the State as his deputy. It is significant that the Prophet of Islam made Abu Bakr lead the prayer several times. This stand of the Prophet was to make it clear to the people that the appointment of the leader of the believers should be in accordance with the opinion of the people and not by appointment. That is why after his death, when the companions gathered together at Saqifa Bani Saeda, an assembly hall in Madinah, Abu Bakr was appointed the successor of the Prophet, after a long consultation. Although the Islamic system is democratic in its nature it would be more appropriate to say that democracy in Islam is indirect democracy rather than direct. That is to say, the entire public is not consulted in the Islamic democratic system. Instead we find different methods in that golden period of Islam known as the Pious Caliphate. None of the caliphs of this period were appointed after consulting the public. Only the senior people available in Madinah were consulted.

This pattern was adopted concerning the appointment of all the four caliphs. With these standard examples during the pious caliphate before us, we should not be wrong in saying that the democratic system of Islam is almost the same as what is called indirect democracy in the jargon of today.

This system entailed selecting a central body after seeking the opinion of the public. This body then selected the caliph. That is why certain scholars have called this method being based on *Arbab hallo Aqd,* that is, the intellectuals, the leaders, those who have a say in society are responsible for selecting the caliph or their

leader. That is to say that this decision-making body will be formed by public opinion and this body in turn will be entrusted with the task of selecting the leader.

We gather from our study that the political structure of Islam is not an unchangeable, rigid structure but has sufficient flexibility to suit the circumstances. For instance, the selection of Abu Bakr at Saqifa Bani Saeda took place after a discussion among the companions, while Umar Faruq was appointed by Abu Bakr Siddiq, the leader of the believers himself, during his last days. Then the third caliph was selected by a six member board nominated by caliph Umar. So far as the selection of the fourth Caliph is concerned, it took place in an emergency situation, due to the murder of the third caliph Uthman; the circumstances did not allow holding normal discussions. Therefore a group of Muslims declared Ali ibn Abi Talib to be the fourth Caliph and the Muslim community accepted his Caliphate. Then during the Umayyad period Umar ibn Abdul Aziz (8th Umayyad Caliph), who is known as the fifth pious caliph was selected as caliph. His election took place in the following manner. The preceding caliph Sulayman ibn Abdul Malik, had left his will in a sealed envelope with instructions that it should be opened only after his death. So this letter was opened in the mosque of Damascus after his demise.

This announcement was made by Reja ibn Haywa, who was appointed by Sulayman to read out this will to the large number of people gathered in the mosque. It was an official announcement of the nomination of Umar ibn Abdul Aziz as caliph. But Umar ibn

Abdul Aziz declared it publicly that he was returning this nomination to the people and it was up to them to choose whomsoever they wanted. At this turn of events, all the people gathered in the mosque chorussed: "We accept you as our caliph." Only after this general consent did Umar accept the caliphate.

The first phase of Islamic history is known as the golden phase. There is no doubt about it that consultation is an established practice in Islam and we see this from the precedent set in this golden period. Yet there is a high degree of flexibility in the principle of consultation in Islam. It is not a hard and fast rule. That is why we find that all the five caliphs were appointed by different methods. Then another fact is that the area of this principle of flexibility in Islamic democracy is very vast. As we see during the Umayyad period, Muawiyah ibn Abi Sufyan, the founder of the Umayyad Caliphate, nominated his son to succeed him. This was clearly the way of kingship or dynastic rule, going patently against the precedents set in the golden period. But this method introduced by Muawiyah became so common that it was adopted by almost all the succeeding caliphs right from Muawiyah to Aurangzeb. Yet the Islamic scholars in general accepted their caliphates giving them their silent approval. This shows that there is great flexibility in the Islamic concept of democracy based on consultation.

This flexibility goes to the extent of even accepting dynastic kingship, if circumstances demand it. As for the governments established on the principle of dynastic rule, the scholars held the

view that a government's fulfilling its social, economic and religious responsibilities was more important than this or that political structure.

That is why in later history we find that although the Muslim scholars did not react to this dynastic rule, they did speak out openly about their responsibilities towards social justice.

The religious scholars (Ulama) never shirked their role of reminding the kings of their social duty. Most of the scholars refrained from accepting any government post so that they might not have to yield to any undue pressure. They thought that by remaining independent they would be able to play their role of censuring the policies of the government and of reminding the rulers of their duties. Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi, known as Mujaddid Alf Sani, provides an excellent example of what role the religious scholars had to play to keep the kings in check.

That is why in later periods of Islamic history, when dynastic rule had become the order of the day among the Muslims, the rulers, more or less, could not deviate far from the Islamic principles of justice. For instance, the ruler had to come to the mosque to pray with the public, he had to spend the money of the Treasury to fulfill the requirements of the public, he had to discharge his religious responsibilities and see to it that the public had no difficulty in discharging its religious rites. Anyone could approach the kings to register his or her complaint. And there was a proper arrangement by the government for the free religious education of the people, etc.

4. The Concept of the State in Islam

From our study of the Quran, Hadith and Islamic history, we come to this conclusion:

1. The position of political rule in Islam is not that of the target of action, but is rather the result of action. That is to say, fulfilling the criteria of faith and good deeds alone makes one deserving of political power.
2. There is no hard and fast rule for the political structure in Islam. Rather we find great flexibility.
3. Although there may be adjustment so far as the political structure is concerned, there can be no adjustment or concession so far as the Islamic spirit is concerned.
4. According to the study of the hadith, our actions towards political reform will be limited to the giving of advice, *i.e.* by peaceful means. This will never go to the extent of launching violent movements aimed at ousting the rulers. As the traditions have it: "When you find corruption among the rulers, you must pay your due and ask your due from God. It is as if the principle of Jesus Christ is also accepted in Islam:

   > "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."
   > (Luke: 20:26).

The Quran tells us: "God enjoins you to do justice." This justice in its basic sense, pertains to individual character. It demands that everyone in his personal life should develop a

character based on justice. When the number of these just people grows into a large group, then they desire to lead their lives based on justice at the congregational or social level. Thus when this social life manifests itself in the form of an organised social institution, it is called the state in Islamic terminology. This action (the desire to lead a just life) will be called just character from the individual point of view and this same action at the social level will be the mainspring of the just state.

5. THE STATUS OF WOMAN IN ISLAM

A study of the Quran and Hadith tells us that in Islam a woman enjoys the same status as that of a man. The Quran says:

> "You are members, one of another." (3:195)

There is no difference between the two as regards status, rights and blessings both in this world and in the Hereafter.

1. The first verse that we find in the Quran on this subject is as follows:

   > 'Mankind, fear *your* Lord who created *you* from one soul and created man's mate from the same soul, from these two scattering on earth many men and women. Fear God, in whose name *you* entreat one another, and be careful not to sever *your* ties of kinship, God is watching over what *you* do.' (4:1)

   This verse of the Quran tells us that God has created man and woman from the same soul, that is, from the same substance. The entire human race has come from Adam and Eve, the first man and the first woman. Looked at in this way human beings on this earth are blood brothers and blood sisters.

2. Another verse of the Quran reads:

   > It is He who created *you* from a single soul and made from him his mate so that he might find comfort in her. (7:89)

This verse stresses the aspect of commonness between man and woman (what is common between the two) that is, both are a source of comfort to one another.

The word 'comfort' relates to all the activities of life, meaning thereby that God has created men and women in such a way that they assist one another in all matters of life, in order to go on life's journey peacefully and successfully.

3. There is another verse in the Quran, which tells us that men and women have equal status in God's eye. None is superior to the other.

> "I will not let the deeds of any doer among you go to waste, be he male or female. You are members, one of another." (3:195)

Abdullah Yusuf Ali, the well known commentator on the Quran, remarks in his commentary on this verse:

> "In Islam the equal status of the sexes is not only recognised but insisted on. If sex distinction, which is a distinction in nature, does not count in spiritual matters, artificial distinctions, such as rank, wealth, position, race, colour, birth, etc., would count even less."

Thus it will be the very same virtues in thought, word and deed, which will be prerequisites for both sexes to enter Paradise. If the qualities of piety, humility, honesty, patience and compassion are demanded of men, they will in like measure be demanded of women.

4. There is a hadith, which also explains that “women are the other half of men.” That is, they are equal halves of one another.

5. The Quran says that men are in charge of, that is, ‘maintainers’ of women (4:34). This does not mean that men have a distinctive status over women. Then being maintainers of women has never been intended as a form of discriminatory treatment. It rather concerns the practical management of the home, for which the man is held responsible. However, this does not mean that a woman will never be allowed to shoulder these responsibilities. If she finds that she can bear this burden, no objection will be raised from any quarter. One example of this can be found in the Quran with reference to the people of Sheba. They lived in Yemen. The famous dam of Marib made their country very prosperous and enabled it to attain a high degree of civilization. The Quran tells us that they were ruled by a woman (27:23) without disapproving of her rule. Bilqis, the Queen of Sheba was very wise and sagacious, even more so than the men in her court. She did not want to embroil her country in war, while the men advised her to confront her enemies, namely, Solomon’s army. Abdullah Yusuf Ali writes:

    > “In Bilqis we have a picture of womanhood, gentle, prudent, and able to tame the wilder passions of her subjects.”

It is an accepted principle with the commentators of the Quran that when the Quran reports something without any disapproval, that means that has been approved of by the Quran.

So when we look at this incident in the light of the Quran, we find the status of woman even higher than that of men. A woman is in charge of men and she has shouldered this responsibility with greater efficacy.

Thus the example of the Queen of Sheba having found mention in the Quran shows that rulership is not man's monopoly. A woman can be a 'qawwam' over a man and the Quran has itself testified to it.

HIJAB IN ISLAM

Now the question arises as to the concept of veil in Islam. Nasiruddin Al-Albani, a famous scholar and traditionist, has written a book titled *Hijab al-Mar'ah al Muslimah fil Kitab was Sunnah*. The author has discussed the subject in the light of the Quran and Hadith. He says that whenever she steps out of her home it is incumbent upon her 'to cover herself completely so as not to show any apart of her body except the face and the hands. According to his findings the following rules of Hijab must be observed by a woman:

1. The whole body, except for the exempted parts should be covered.

2. But any veil, which in itself becomes an attraction, is to be avoided.
3. Garments should not be semi-transparent.
4. Dress should not be tight-fitting.

The first rule of Hijab has been derived from Chapter 24, Verse 31. Allama Nasiruddin Albani interprets the wording "to cover their adornments except such as are normally displayed," to mean that the hands and face are exempt from covering.

He has drawn extensively from the Hadith in support of his argument. After studying the traditions in connection with the Quranic verses (24:31, 33:59) he writes: "It is clear from the instances drawn from the Quran and the Hadith that though it is preferable for a woman to cover her face, it is not compulsory for her to do so.

"It would be better if women followed this practice, but there is no harm if they do not." He concludes his argument with these words: "The garment should cover the entire body of a woman except the face and hands, and should not become an attraction in itself. Neither should it be thin or tight. It should not accentuate the body.

Maulana Shabbir Usmani, the well-known Indian commentator on the Quran gives the following commentary on this verse of the Quran:

> "It is evident from the Hadith and *athar* (the sayings and deeds of the Prophet's companions) that the face and hands are exempt, because it is not possible to keep them covered while performing the various chores of daily life and even religious rites. If they are ordered to be strictly covered, it will create great difficulties for women in carrying out their jobs. The theologians have considered the feet also to be exempted parts."

This exemption of face, hands and feet, derived from verse 31 of chapter 24 is extremely important. This shows that Islam does not intend to stop women from going out to receive education or to work but rather desires them to observe the Islamic culture known as *Hijab*. *Hijab* requires a dress, which properly covers the body, for she is obliged to observe the rules of modesty.

Another important matter concerning women is education. A study of the life of the Prophet of Islam tells us that education is as essential for women as it is for men. The actual goal of education from the Islamic point of view is to make him or her an aware person. And without doubt it is only aware men and women who can conduct the practical matters of life smoothly.

We find an example in this connection in the life of the Prophet of Islam in relation to his wife Aishah. There are such traditions as tell us that the Prophet's conversations with Aishah were aimed at educating her. Aishah says that when the Prophet of Islam would get up at night after a few hours to sleep, in that peaceful

atmosphere he would converse with her over a long period of time. (*Sahih* al-Bukhari, *Sahih* Muslim)

This course of informal education continued uninterruptedly, for Aishah used to accompany him even on his journeys.

This informal education was so important for Aishah that she became the most distinguished personality so far as religious knowledge was concerned. She survived the Prophet for a full fifty years. Throughout this period she remained a very valuable source for the acquisition of religious knowledge. Her house served as a school of religious learning.

In the early period of Islam, regarded as model for all believers, we have a number of examples that show that women used to take part in practical matters. For instance Khadijah, the Prophet's wife, conducted business, and Fatimah, the Prophet's daughter helped with giving first aid to the wounded in battle. Asma, Abu Bakr's daughter, looked after her camels and date orchard, etc.

Western civilization believes in gender equality, that is man and woman are one and the same thing. There is no difference of any kind between the two. But Islam regards this equality as unnatural. In the light of Islamic teachings men and women both are, without doubt, equal. In God's eyes, both have equal rights and duties. Owing to their biological structure, however, they are different from one another. That is to say, they are equal but different.

The characteristics of true believers, both men and women, are referred to in the Quran in these words:

> "Those .... who are devout, sincere, patient, humble, charitable and chaste, who fast and are even mindful of God - on these both men and women, God will bestow forgiveness and a rich reward." (33:35)

These are the attributes, which both men and women must cultivate if they want to become God's favoured servants. These are the qualities that form the basis of Islam, and are the true means of salvation in the Hereafter.



6. WAR AND PEACE IN ISLAM

IN order to appreciate the position of war and peace in Islam, we have to answer another question concerning the goal of Islam. What is the actual plan of Islam regarding human life? To answer this question we have to refer to the Quran, the source of Islamic teachings:

1. Chapter 103 of the Quran, titled Al-Asr, is regarded as the essence of Islamic teachings. It reads:

    > "I swear by the declining day that perdition shall be the lot of man, except for those who believe and do good deeds, and exhort one another to truth and to patience."

    From these verses in the Quran we find that success depends on four things. That is, one should have faith in God, possess right beliefs, observe Islam fully, adopt Islamic ideology wholeheartedly, and lead a life of virtuous action and God-consciousness. We should accept the standard set by God in regard to the truth and untruth.

    Not only we should adopt all these beliefs and practices in our own lives but we should also enjoin upon others truth and forbearance as a matter of religious duty.

2. There is another verse in the Quran:

    > "God enjoins justice, kindness and charity to one's kindred, and forbids indecency, wickedness and

oppression. He admonishes *you* so that *you* may take heed." (16:90)

Because of the importance of this verse, the fifth pious caliph issued instructions that it should be made a part of the Friday sermon.

This verse tells us how human beings are supposed to lead their lives in this world. The first thing, which is most important, is to deal justly. That is, whatever right one has over another person should be fulfilled. People should learn of the needs of their relatives as well as other fellow human beings and spend their money to fulfill their needs. They should not indulge in such things as are disapproved of in society. They should not adopt the way of arrogance and haughtiness. They should not only refrain from evil deeds themselves, but should also persuade others to do the same.

There are a number of such verses as make it clear that war and violence are alien to the scheme of Islam. In fact, they have nothing to do with the kind of man Islam wants to build. It is entirely based on bringing about a revolution in thought, and aims at building a personality based on moral values. Man has to be wholly imbued with the divine hue. However, another question relates to the fact that human beings lead their lives in a society. Social life repeatedly produces mutual conflicts. Everyone thinks differently, everyone's interests clash with those of others and these differences sometimes escalate to war and violence.

In such a situation the question is how to deal with the problem of differences and controversies.

The teaching of Islam in this matter is that on all such occasions our best efforts should be aimed at defusing the controversy in its initial stage, it should not be allowed to reach the stage of violent clash and confrontation scheme to war. This is indeed a strategy to avoid a war from taking place. There are a number of ways of such avoidance.

The first way, as the Quran tells us, is to “avoid the ignorant”. (7:199) That is, instead of clashing with them one must adopt the policy of avoidance. Another word that the Quran uses for this is patience. The Quran goes to the extent of according patience the status of worship:

> Those that endure with fortitude shall be requited without measure. (39:10)

Sabr means avoidance of retaliatory activities, in spite of provocation from the other party. This patient attitude has been held to be deserving of the choicest blessings from God. This Quranic teaching of patience and avoidance has been explained by a companion of the Prophet in these words: “One who will not tolerate minor evil perpetrated by an ignorant person will have to tolerate a major evil.” This means that whenever there is any provocation from antagonists, at that time an individual or a nation has one of two choices: that the provocation should be avoided in the very first instance and not allowed to reach the extent of war and violence, so that the lesser evil is nipped in the bud. In this

matter we find a very important principle in Islam in a hadith narrated by Aishah, the Prophet's wife. While describing the general policy of the Prophet of Islam she said that whenever the Prophet of Islam had to opt for one of two ways he would always opt for the easier option and discard the harder one. In all controversial situations between two parties, attempts to solve the problem should be made only in the peaceful sphere. Taking the second option means attempting to solve the problem of 'guns' with 'bombs'. It is this second option, which turns conflicts into war.

The life of the Prophet of Islam tells us that he adopted this method, called the easier option by Aishah, throughout his entire life. At least a hundred times he had to face the confrontation produced by his opponents, but he always opted for the way of the easier option. He could almost always avoid any head-on clash by peaceful strategy. That is why we find that between the Prophet and his opponents collisions took place only three times: at the battles of Badr, Uhud and Hunayn.

Although many incidents have been termed "battles" in the books of seerah, on examining them closely we find that these are only different forms of avoidance and not of indulgence in war. For instance, we find in the books of Seerah the names of battles like Ghazwa-e-Tabuk, Ghazwa-e-Khandaq, Ghazwa-e-Makka, Ghazwa Hamraul Asad, whereas in all these battles and a number of other such battles the Prophet always succeeded in managing to avoid war by employing some strategy or the other. So we can safely conclude that peace is the rule in Islam and war is only a rare exception.

Now the question arises as to why, in the first place, there is the injunction to wage war in Islam and why the Prophet had to go to war with his opponents three times. We learn from the Quran that so far as the matter is confined to mere provocation or an insignificant loss the way of patience and avoidance must be adopted. But when the other party initiates the aggression, then at that time war can be waged in defence. The first principle in this regard is that which we learn from the Quran:

> "So long as they are straight with you, be straight with them." (9:7)

This means that so long as your adversary has not initiated aggression and has not compelled you to wage war, you should live with him peacefully, never initiating aggression under any circumstance. The constructive goals of Islam can be achieved only when there are friendly relations between Muslims and non-Muslims, that is why this injunction has been given in the Quran. This shows that fighting in Islam is permitted only when there is simply no other option. That is why the verse which gives Muslims permission to fight in self-defence, is given in these words:

> Permission to fight is given to those who are attacked, because they have been wronged. God will certainly help those who help Him. (22:39)

Similarly, at another place the Quran says:

> "Fight in the name of God those who fight you, but do not go beyond the limits. God does not love the transgressors." (2:190).

At yet another place the Quran states it clearly that war can be waged only when it has been initiated by the other party. This verse of the Quran on this subject is very explicit:

> "It was they who initiated hostilities against you in the first place." (9:13)

A study of the Quran, Hadith and Fiqh tells us that Islam gives permission to fight only in defence. Yet even in the waging of a defensive war, Islam sets clear conditions. An Islamic war is one which is waged by only fulfilling all these conditions. A war in which these conditions are not observed is not an Islamic war, even if this is waged by Muslims in the name of Islam. Here are some of the conditions:

1. War can be declared only by an established government. Non-governmental organisations have no permission to wage war. War is a state matter in Islam. The public has only the permission to work peacefully. They are not allowed to go to the extent of engaging themselves in armed struggle.
2. Even for a genuine war it is essential that it be formally declared. Undeclared war is not permissible, even by a government.
3. Even in a genuine war Islam allows only combatants to be attacked. The killing of non-combatants is not allowed in any war, however justified it might be. According to the Islamic conditions a lawful war is only one which is a defensive war, no war like gorilla war, proxy war,

> undeclared war is permissible in Islam. War for reform, for removing obstacles, or for putting an end to injustice, are also not permissible in Islam.

If we have to bring about reform in any society, or we have to remove certain obstacles, these tasks can be carried out only through peaceful struggle. If the problem is not solved through peaceful struggle, even then we have to remain patient and on no pretext can we engage in armed struggle according to Islam. We have to remain patient and work peacefully towards that end.

The Prophet of Islam has been called a Mercy to all the nations. The word mercy is another name for peace. We can put it differently and say that the Prophet of Islam was a Prophet of peace. He was sent to establish peace in the world. A study of Seerah tells us that peace was the greatest concern of the Prophet. Most of the traditions of the Prophet are directly or indirectly in the nature of an injunction to maintain peace. Similarly, a study of the 30-year life of the Prophet tells us that in all matters the Prophet always adopted methods aimed at establishing peace.

For instance, according to one tradition, the Prophet of Islam said: “Do not wish confrontation with your enemy, always ask for peace from God.” (al-Bukhari) This shows that the actual object desirable by the Prophet was peace not confrontation. For one who is sincere in his prayers for peace, it is not possible to opt for war instead of peace.

Similarly on another occasion the Prophet of Islam said:

> God grants to non-violence what He does not grant to violence.

This saying of the Prophet of Islam tells us that, because of their consequences, the Prophet regarded war and violence as futile. He was convinced that goals can be achieved only by peaceful means. No positive results can be achieved by the violent method. This saying amounts to a Prophetic declaration in favour of peace and against war.

In this connection one finds a number of sayings of the Prophet of Islam in the books of Seerah and traditions which tell us directly or indirectly that war and violence are to be abhorred. It was peace which the Prophet desired most. This is because Islam is a religion of peace. The Quran calls its ways "the paths of Peace" (5:16). It favours reconciliation as the best policy (4:128). It is clearly stated in the Quran that God abhors the disturbance of peace (2:205).

Thus I would like to conclude this chapter with this prayer of the Prophet:

> O God, you are peace. Peace is from you. Peace returns to you. O Lord, let us live a life of peace. O Lord, usher us into your home, the house of peace. Glory be to God, the most high. All glory and all greatness is for you, O Lord.

7. THE IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION IN ISLAM

> "My Lord! Increase me in Knowledge." (20:114)

THE mission of the Prophet of Islam has been introduced in the Quran at more than one place as an Instructor of the Book and giver of wisdom. Here is a verse from the Quran:

> "He it is who has raised among the unlettered people a Messenger from among themselves who recites to them His signs and purifies them, and to instruct them in the Book and wisdom." (62:2)

Similarly, on another occasion the Prophet of Islam presented himself before the people saying, "I have been sent only as a teacher."

Then the first word revealed in the form of the Quran was 'Iqra' (96:1). The fourth verse of the first revelation forming part of the chapter *Al-Qalam* has this to say:

> "God has taught man by the pen." (96:4)

We find more than 1500 derivatives and synonyms of the word *Ilm*, that is, knowledge. It becomes easy to understand in the light of this how the revelation of the Quran in this almost illiterate nation of Arabia set off such a wave of receiving and imparting education, which can rightly be called a learning explosion.

The revolution brought about by this learning explosion ushered in a new age of highly developed culture and civilization not only in Arabia but all over the world. This is a fact that has been acknowledged by historians. For instance, Indian historian, T. Rama Rao begins his biography of the Prophet of Islam with these words:

> When he appeared, Arabia was a desert—a nothing. Out of nothing of the desert a new world was fashioned by the mighty spirit of Muhammad. A new life, a new culture, a new civilization, a new kingdom, which extended from Morocco to India and influenced the thought and life of three continents—Asia, Africa and Europe (*Life of Muhammad*).

MERIT OF THE LEARNED AND LEARNERS

The Quran and Hadith both hold men of knowledge superior to the ignorant. (39:9) The books of hadith have a whole lengthy chapter devoted to the importance of knowledge, and the rewards of teaching and learning.

For instance, there is a tradition that one who treads a path in search of knowledge has his way paved to paradise by God as a reward for this noble deed (Bukhari, Muslim)

In a tradition recorded by Tirmidhi, angels in heaven, fish in the water and ants in their dwellings pray for the well-being of a seeker of knowledge.

In another hadith the Prophet of Islam observed, those who learn virtues and teach it to others are the best among humankind (Al-Bayhaqi).

Not more than 150 people all over Arabia knew how to read and write. They made the maximum use of their ability to memorise, preserving all their literary heritage in their memory. There is no trace of any systematic or organised activity of learning or teaching in the society. But soon after the revelation of the Quran, the trend of receiving education set in, and everyone who accepted Islam learnt the Quran from the Prophet, and after learning it himself taught to other converts. In this way the homes of the early Muslims—Abu Bakr Siddiq, Al-Arqam bin Al-Arqam, Fatimah bint Khattab—turned into centres of learning. Moreover, from the very outset, the Prophet appointed scribes who were assigned to write down the Quranic portions as soon as they were revealed. This motivated others as well to learn writing so that they might make their own copies of the holy textbook. It is to be noted that even under life-threatening circumstances, when the Prophet had had the first and second pledge at Al-Aqabah, three years before the migration, he appointed twelve people who were most learned amongst them as teachers of the Quran. These teachers were so sincere and enthusiastic that within a short period of three years they spread the knowledge of the Quran to almost each and every home of the tribes of Al-Aws and Al-Khazraj. Hence when the Prophet arrived at Madinah in the 13th year of his Prophethood, he found all the young and old people of these tribes well versed in the teachings of the Quran.

At the Battle of Badr 70 people were taken prisoner. The decision was taken after consultation with the senior companions that on payment of 4000 dirhams each they would be set free. Most of the Makkans being businessmen, knew how to read and write. But the Madinans were mostly farmers, who did not know how to read or write. Owing to the importance of education in Islam it was decided that those prisoners of war who were not able to pay ransom, should be asked to teach 10 Muslim children in order to secure their freedom. This was the first proper school in Islam established by the Prophet himself (*Tabaqat*, Ibn Sad).

The learning explosion produced by the first divine word *Iqra* continued non-stop. It initially began at Makkah and gradually spread throughout the world. After the demise of the Prophet, the companions spread out in the neighbouring countries with the same spirit of seeking knowledge and imparting it to others. From Makkah to Madinah to Abyssinia to Iraq, to Egypt, to Baghdad this revolutionary educational movement gradually passed on to Central Asia and the East, then to Spain and the West.

For more than a thousand years these served as international centres of learning, education, medicine and multidimensional development in all spheres of life.

Women were not kept away from these activities. Starting with the Prophet's own household, Muslim families provided equal opportunities to the female members of the family to learn to grow and play a constructive role in the progress and development of society at large. A large number of learned women have found

mention in history as authorities on various Islamic sciences such as hadith, Islamic jurisprudence, seerah of the Prophet, commentary on the Quran, etc. The Prophet's own wife, Aishah, imparted the knowledge and wisdom she received from the first educator, for almost half a century. She has narrated more than two thousand traditions of the Prophet, and according to the Muslim jurists, these are the source of two thirds of Islamic laws relating to social, political and cultural issues.

Biographers such as Ibn Khallikan (author of *Waqeyatul Ayan*), Ibn Sa'd (author of *Tabaqat*), Khatib Bhaghdadi (author of *Taarikh Baghdad*) and Al-Miqrizi (author of *al-Khutal wal-Athar*) have mentioned the names of thousands of women and their outstanding contribution in the field of education and development in the Muslim world. Noteworthy among them, for instance, are the two sisters of Al-Fahri of Morocco, Fatimah and Maryam, the daughters of Muhammad ibn Abdullah, who founded the Qayrawan University and the Andalus University in the historical city of Fas in 245 A.H.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF NATURAL SCIENCES

The emphasis of Islam on learning and teaching was not confined to the Quran or the teachings of the Prophet. The Quran, in fact, has given a new outlook, a new perspective or paradigm as coined by Thomas Kahn (*The Structure of Scientific Revolution*, 1955). According to this Quranic paradigm, man's most important activity being intellectual contemplation or reflection, he was not supposed to blindly follow any idea or notion just because it was

attributed to his ancestors or some other authority. He had to ponder on it critically and realistically. That is why we find that the Quran is replete with hundreds of inspirational and motivational verses that invite man to reflect on the wonderful creatures of God. For example: In the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the alternation of night and day, there are signs for people with intelligence, those who remember God standing, sitting, and lying on their sides, and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth, (saying) "Our Lord! You have not created all this in vain (without purpose), Glory be to You. (3:190-91, 7:176, 10:24, 13:3, 16:11).

This, we can say, was the intellectual seed, which is called in academic circles the spirit of enquiry. According to Toynbee and other world historians, this spirit of enquiry was the first and foremost prerequisite for the inauguration of the scientific era and the elimination of a superstitious outlook on nature and life. So it would not be an exaggeration to say that it is the Quran that has laid down the foundation of modern science. On the other hand, the Prophet himself has dealt with day-to-day problems of life in accordance with this realistic approach taught by the Quran. Consequently the same realistic approach became an integral part of the frame of mind of his companions. They all became curious, inquisitive and realistic in all matters of life.

For example, once the Prophet passed by an oasis where he found the farmers, who were date planters at work. When he asked what they were doing, he was told that they were pollinating the clusters of dates in order to produce a better yield. The Prophet

expressed his disapproval of this process. Knowing this, the farmers immediately stopped it. But later on the Prophet was told that due to lack of proper pollination the yield had been very low as compared to the previous years. On hearing this, the Prophet replied. "You know your worldly matters better." (Sahih Bukhari) In other words, experiment and observation should be the final criteria in such worldly matters.

The invitation of the Quran to inquiry on the one hand and the encouragement of the Prophet to engage in direct observation and reflection on the other led the Muslims to study everything objectively. They started eagerly learning from everyone irrespective of his or her religious and cultural origins. This trend of insatiable curiosity and open mindedness motivated the succeeding generations during the Umayyad and Abbasid times to enthusiastically learn and translate the cultural legacy of other nations, particularly the Persian, Greek and Roman. Abu Jafar Mansur (754-775) established Bayt al Hikmah (the House of Wisdom) where highly paid multilingual scholars were appointed to translate into Arabic books on Persian literature, Greek philosophy, medicine, and other sciences available in those times in different parts of the world.

This was an actualisation of the Prophet's inspiring words: "Wisdom is a believer's own property, he should try to take it wherever he finds it. Of the Abbasid Caliphs, Harun Ar-Rashid, Al-Mamun and Mutadid Billah, are reported to have invited doctors, philosophers, and learned scholars from various parts of the world to

settle in Muslim cities and help in these activities. They even bought some books by paying for them in gold equivalent to their weight.

This generous appreciation and support of the State accelerated research work, and cultural exchange through translation, which reflected on the general progress and development of the entire Muslim world at that time. Spain, under Muslim rule, witnessed a similar progressive and developmental process. A number of world renowned historians of science and civilization. (e.g. Hughman) have pointed out that Muslims' contribution in the development of natural sciences and philosophy were not merely confined to translations from Greek, Persian, Indian, etc. For in view of their inquisitive and critical mind-set, it were not possible for them to accept Greek philosophy or any other sciences without an objective analysis. The fervour shown in authentification of the Prophet's words was also in action in the field of natural science. Therefore Muslim scientists, doctors and other experts were able to remove so many superstitious notions about nature and life that prevailed among the Greek philosophers. On the other hand they proved to be creative and innovative in the widest sense of the term. They sent missions for exploring new lands. They established observatories. They corrected many false concepts in astronomy, medicine, chemistry and physics. It was the legacy of the Islamic civilization that reached Europe via Spain after the fall of Granada in 1492 A.H., which laid the foundation of the Renaissance in the West.

Islam attaches such great importance to learning that the Quran has this to say:

> "It is the men of knowledge who can truly realise God." (35:28)

Scholars are considered to be like angels (3:18), in view of their potential for discovering the oneness and the glory of the Creator. To inculcate this importance of knowledge in the minds of the believers, the Prophet once observed that the worship of a learned man is a thousand times better than that of the ignorant worshipper (*Mustadrak Al-Hakim*). By way of encouraging reflection on the universe and nature in order to explore divine glories, the Prophet is reported to have said: "An hour of reflection is better than a hundred years of worship without reflection." (Al-Bayhaqi).

It was this interrelatedness of knowledge and worship that made the early Muslims seek and impart knowledge wholeheartedly and religiously.

But knowledge for the sake of knowledge as such may not be an acceptable notion according to Islamic ideology. Instead, a Muslim is supposed to seek knowledge for the pleasure of his Lord on the one hand and for the rendering of better services to the welfare of humankind on the other. In other words, the motto of education in Islam would be knowledge for the sake of serving God and His creatures. That is why from the very beginning almost equal attention has been paid to the learning of both the religious sciences and the worldly or secular sciences.

Imam Ghazzali noticing a lack of interest among the youth of his times in learning medicine and other useful crafts and skills,

issued a fatwah that doctors, craftsmen, and experts of other human skills are not less important than the scholars of fiqh, hadith and pure religious sciences (*Al-Qadim waal Hadith,* M. Kurd Ali). If the two-fold purpose of life is to worship God and serve mankind, then a believer cannot succeed in achieving it unless he devotes all his potential to the acquisition of religious and non-religious knowledge. Thus we may conclude that:

a) *Iqra* being the first word revealed in the Quran, an intellectual process was simultaneously started which we have called the learning explosion.

b) The commandment of Iqra has been linked with the name of God (Read in the name of your Sustainer). This connection has given at the very outset the Islamic concept of education, that is, knowledge should not be sought after for the sake of knowledge, but for the sublime purpose of the realisation of God and the welfare of man.

c) This two-fold purpose of life naturally called for Muslims to strive hard in seeking knowledge both related to their religion and to the progress and development of the human condition in general. Since the Quran and hadith have made no discrimination between men and women concerning their rights and duties, the commandment of Iqra is equally inspiring and motivating to womenfolk. Consequently, they also did their best and contributed to this noble cause with the same spirit, fervour and dedication.

d) The Quran paradigm based on the concept of Tawhid has changed the traditional approach to the universe and human life. An intellectual revolution took place, superstitious thinking was replaced by rationalistic, realistic and objective analysis. Thus in the words of Henry Pirenne, Islam changed the face of the globe. The traditional order of human history was overthrown.

8. THE CONCEPT OF IJTIHAAD IN ISLAM

IJTIHAAD as a source of Islamic shariah has the approval of both the Quran and the Sunnah. It is known as 'inference' in the Quran (4:83) and Ijtihaad in tradition (sayings of the Prophet). It is first referred to in a famous tradition of the Prophet concerning Muaz ibn Jabal, a companion of the Prophet. The practice of Ijtihaad, according to Muslim jurists (Fuqaha) can take place at two levels: one is collective, which is called Ijma (consensus), while the other is individual in nature and is known as *Qiyas* (Analogy). Both the Ijma and Qiyas aim at re-application of the principles of the Quran and Sunnah to situations and problems not explicitly covered by these two basic sources of religious legislation. (For details see: *Al-Umm*, by Imam Shafii)

The compilation of the Quran in book form, instead of in the separate portions possessed by the companions, is taken as a historical example of collective Ijtihaad, i.e. Ijma in which all the companions of the Prophet unanimously agreed on the legitimacy of the project. Further details on this subject will be given later on, while Qiyas (analogy), which is generally exercised at the individual level, is illustrated by the following. The Quran prohibits the drinking of wine. Similarly, the Prophet's Sunnah contains a number of prohibiting commandments in this connection. In those times wine was the only intoxicant. That is why the Quran and Sunnah have prohibited wine specifically. But what about drugs like

hashish, cocaine, heroin, etc.? The Muslim jurists here applied the principle of Qiyas. The *muskir* (intoxicant) mentioned in the Hadith (Musnad Ahmad) was further elaborated upon by them to include any substance, liquid or solid, causing "intoxication" and hence like wine, will be considered as *haram* (prohibited). (*Usul al-Fiqh*, A.W. Khallaf)

One who exercises Ijtihaad is termed "Mujtahid" as opposed to "Muqallid" (one who unquestioningly abides by an established school of law). There is a particular branch of Islamic jurisprudence called "Usul al-Fiqh" (the fundamental principles of jurisprudence), which exclusively deals with this topic. Starting with Shafi's book *Al-Umm,* a great number of books have been written to date on this subject. According to these books, Mujtahid is of two kinds: *Mutlaq* (independent/unrestricted) and *Muqayyad* (dependent/restricted). Sunni Muslims in general recognise only four independent Mujtahid in Islamic history. First, Abu Hanifah (81-150 A.H.), with whom the Hanafi school of law is identified. Secondly, Malik ibn Anas (94-179), the founder of the Maliki School of Law, thirdly, Ash Shafii (150-205), who is considered the founder of the Shafii School of Law, and lastly, Ahmad ibn Hanbal (164-241) the originator of the Hanbali School of Law.

In the present chapter the vastness of the literature of *Usul-al Fiqh* preclude the possibility of lengthy discussion of the fundamental principles of Ijtihaad. The author is mainly concerned here with showing the relevance of Ijtihaad in the contemporary world. Traditional scholars hold that, after the above mentioned

four Imams, no one is authorised to practice independent Ijtihaad. But an objective study of the Quran and hadith and other relevant books surprisingly led me to the following conclusions:

a) Neither in the Quran nor in the hadith is there clear evidence in favour of the traditional notion that Ijtihaad is no longer allowed or required.

b) None of the four Imams mentioned above ever claimed that the succeeding generations could do nothing but follow them, without ever feeling the need to attempt an independent Ijtihaad on any given subject.

c) A considerable number of scholars, right from the earlier period to the present day have not only encouraged Ijtihaad but have also strongly criticised the notion of *taqlid* (as opposed to Ijtihaad). Among them are the names of scholars as great as (1) Ahmad ibn Hanbal, (2) Ibn Abdus-Salam, (3) As-Suyuti (4) Al-Shawkani (5) Bahrul Uloom Abdul Ali (6) Grand Shaykh Al-Azhar M. Al Maraghi.

In view of these facts the whole of this chapter is devoted to examining (a) What is Ijtihaad in its applied form and (b) What are the areas or problems in modern times that urgently require Ijtihaad, if Islam and the Muslims have to march forward in the current millennium.

Ijtihaad literally means 'doing one's utmost'. In the terminology of jurisprudence it refers to any effort made towards the application of Islamic teachings to suit new or changing situations.

Ijtihaad does not mean simply personal opinion, but rather the seeking of guidance from the Quran and Hadith regarding changed situations. The task can be performed only by those who have a thorough knowledge of the Quran and Hadith. Coupled with this, they should also be sincere in seeking guidance from these basic sources of Islam. Whether Ijtihaad is practised through Ijma or Qiyas, certain things must be borne in mind as pre-requisites for its validity in relation to the Shariah.

a) Ijtihaad must be based on fundamental principles laid down by the Quran and the Prophet and should not be inconsistent with them.

b) The fundamental principles of the Shariah may be applied and re-applied to any new situation through Ijtihaad, provided this does not change anything clearly declared *Haraam* (unlawful) into *Halal* (lawful), or vice versa.

c) Any law, rules, regulations concluded through Ijtihaad will be acceptable only when they are conducive to achieving the essential purposes of the Islamic shariah, which is broadly divided into five categories : (i) preservation of life (ii) preservation of money (iii) preservation of self-respect and dignity (iv) preservation of one's religion (v) preservation of the intellect or sanity of mind (*Al-Muwafaqat*, Shatibi).

Let us look at further examples. The Prophet once sent a group of the Companions to the settlement of Banu Qurayza on the

outskirts of Madinah. They set off after saying their noon prayer. While despatching them, the Prophet gave them this instruction:

> "You should not say your afternoon prayer before reaching your destination in Banu Qurayza." (Bukhari).

The companions left Madinah after their *zuhr* (noon) prayer. But, when the sun was about to set they had still not reached the Banu Qurayza. Seeing this, some of them said that if they followed the Prophet literally they would miss the time specified for their *Asr* (afternoon) prayer. So they said their prayers midway. Others differed from this opinion, saying that they would say their prayers only after reaching the settlement of Banu Qurayza, as the Prophet had bade them.

When these people returned to Madinah, this issue was brought before the Prophet. The Prophet approved the decision taken by those who had said their prayers before reaching their destination. They contended in justification of their act that when the Prophet told them to say their Asr prayer only after reaching the Banu Qurayza, he intended only to accelerate their journey and reach the destination as soon as possible.

This incident makes the sense of Ijtihaad clear. We can say that Ijtihaad is a process of arriving at reasoned decisions to suit new circumstances in order to better fulfill the purposes of the Shariah. Both the Prophet and his companions exercised Ijtihaad. The Ijtihaad of the Prophet served to instruct the companions in the method of Ijtihaad.

8. The Concept of Ijtihaad in Islam

Ijtihaad is a process, which is always at work in Islam. The commandments of Islam are eternal in nature but the circumstances keep changing. That is what necessitates the proper understanding of the spirit of Islamic commandment and seek their re-application in changed circumstances.

For instance the Muslim community has been commanded in the Quran to prepare for power. (8:60) Power has been defined as the ability to inspire awe in the enemy. In ancient times power meant possessing an army and weapons. But today, after the great progress made in science and industry, circumstances have been totally revolutionised. Now power is not confined to military weapons alone. Now education, social institutions, journalism, industry, scientific research, economy, the electronic media, etc. are all sources of power. Now on the question of the preparation for power, a Mujtahid, (literally one who strives) for making original decisions on canon law, rather than applying precedents already established) can say that the commandment of the Quran is undoubtedly eternal in nature, but that its reapplication will be sought according to modern circumstances. And that plans for making progress will now be made in peaceful arenas.

In modern times, Russia provides one example of the accumulating of all sorts of weapons, including 30,000 nuclear warheads. On the contrary, Japan did not make any military preparation, rather made plans on a vast scale to go ahead in the fields of education and economy. The result was totally different.

Russia with all its military force collapsed, while Japan has become an economic superpower in the modern world.

Islamic Ijtihaad, on parallel with the above, would entail a fresh planning of the Muslim Ummah or Muslim State according to the demands of modern times. Progressing beyond ancient traditional thinking, the plan of progress and development should be chalked out in the light of modern requirements.

This matter of Ijtihaad relates to all walks of life. For instance, there is a tradition, which says:

> "Start your fast after sighting the moon of the month of Ramadan, and break your fast (to celebrate Eid) after sighting the moon." (Abu Dawood)

According to the words of the tradition it was held that 'sighting the moon' depended on seeing with the eyes. That is to say, the first of Ramadan was to be fixed by sighting the moon with one's eyes and the same applied to the first of Shawwal (the day of Eid). Thus fasting as well as Eid would both depend on the sighting of the moon.

However, in modern times something new has been brought into existence, which had never existed before—the observatory. The moon, like other astronomical bodies, is sighted by the latest telescopes and other scientific devices in the observatory and the correct and precise movement of the moon is determined by modern machines, which carry out the necessary mathematical calculations. This system is so perfect that an absolutely accurate

estimate can be made in advance as to the date and exact time that the new moon will be sighted.

Now the situation is such that there is a pressing need for Ijtihaad. In the case, Ijtihaad would rule that where tradition uses the word 'sighting', the Mujtahid would say that according to the change in circumstances, this tradition needs to be given a new interpretation. And that is that the sighting of the moon by the machines will be held to be as reliable as that of the human eye.

That is, if on the occasion of the beginning of the month the horizon is not clear and the moon cannot be sighted by the human eye, a mechanical observation will be relied upon. If the moon has risen according to the mechanical observation the decision will be taken that the month of Ramadan has started and the fasting will be observed.

Let this point be made clear here that, according to modern research the new moon appears on the 29th of every month. However, the moon can be sighted only when it is 8 degrees above the horizon.

In ancient times man had no knowledge of this reality. That is why in those days sighting by the human eye was the only dependable source. Now that by means of calculation or the "mechanical eye" the movement of the moon can be ascertained with precision, it will certainly be a proper use of Ijtihaad to establish that the sighting of the moon by the mechanical eye is as dependable a source as that of the human eye.

> "Ijtihaad of this kind has continued to be exercised in Islamic history. This process of Ijtihaad is essential to lend an eternal character to the teachings of Islam. If this process of Ijtihaad comes to a standstill, Islam's eternal journey will also be affected." (*Al-Islam*, Maulana Wahiduddin Khan)

Here we provide some instances from the early history of Islam.

The written or recorded pieces of the Quran were collected during the caliphate of Abu Bakr, the first caliph, and under the guidance of Zayd ibn Thabit Ansari one copy of the complete Quran was compiled in book form.

After the preparation of this volume the question arose as to what should be done with the remaining recorded parts of the Quran, which had been collected from the possessions of different companions. These were written on such diverse materials as bones, leaves of the date, white stones, thin skin, depending upon what was available in those days.

A study of Islamic history shows that, after long deliberations, a consensus emerged among the concerned companions that those fragmentary parts should be burnt. This was a clear case of Ijtihaad. (See details in *Tadween-e-Quran*, by M.A. Gilaani). Similarly, during the caliphate of Umar Farooq, the second caliph of Islam, when Iraq's fertile land was conquered, the question arose as to how this land was to be administered.

According to the prevailing custom, the movable and immovable spoils of war were divided among the soldiers after the conquest, for in those days there was generally no regular or standing army. People used to join the army voluntarily, and it was in the form of booty that they were given remuneration.

But the caliph Umar refused to give away the land of Iraq to the soldiers as booty. A meeting of the senior knowledgeable companions was called to deliberate over this matter. Finally the consensus emerged that the land should be the property of the State. This was a case of Ijtihaad, a decision arrived at by the consensus of the companions, keeping in view the spirit and long-term aims of the Islamic shariah. (*Tarikh Umar ibn Khattab*, Ibn Jawzi).

Similarly, during the Abbasid caliphate, when the Hadith was collected and compiled and also the fiqh (Islamic law) was compiled, this whole method was based on Ijtihaad. For there was no precedent of this type of task in the Prophet's time. This process of collection and compilation was approved of by all the scholars of Islam.

But in later periods of Islamic history when the political institution of Islam weakened, some scholars declared that now the door of Ijtihaad must be closed lest it lead to anarchy. In this way, the process of Ijtihaad has been almost entirely in abeyance for the last several hundred years.

Ijtihaad is a natural requirement. In the ever-changing phases of life its importance is so great that, even after the door of Ijtihaad having been closed, its process is continuing without any formal announcement.

One interesting example of this dates back to the British period, when paper currency replaced gold and silver coins. There lived in Delhi a great scholar by the name of Abdul Haq Haqqani. He was asked to issue a fatwa (religious edict) as to whether these paper notes were lawful or unlawful. He did not comply with this request, saying: “My fatwa will not gain currency, but paper notes will.”

The truth is that no excuse justifies closing the door of Ijtihaad. According to a tradition recorded in *Sahih* Al-Bukhari:

> “The Prophet of Islam observed: One who exercised Ijtihaad and succeeded in reaching the right decision would be doubly rewarded, and if he failed to reach the right decision, he would also be rewarded for his sincere effort towards this end.”

This tradition clearly and unconditionally encourages the process of Ijtihaad by saying that even when there is a chance of going wrong, it should be continued, the reason being that putting a stop to Ijtihaad brings about intellectual stagnation, and without doubt this is a greater evil than a wrong decision.

A number of important issues have come up in modern times, but, without Ijtihaad Muslims have failed to receive proper

guidance. This has resulted in great and irreparable losses. For instance, in modern times science has come to receive great importance. But Muslims have continued to keep away from it holding it to be something unIslamic. Similarly the political principle of democracy has been introduced to the world, but Muslims fail to understand its utility.

In a similar way, secularism is a popular political philosophy in modern times. But Muslim scholars fail to understand its practical utility and that is why they have come to regard it as unlawful.

On the issue of nationalism too, religious scholars have failed to adopt a correct stand. That is why Muslims are still confused about it. Nationhood in modern times is based on the homeland. That is to say, those who share a common land will have the same nationhood, whatever their religion and culture might be. Today this concept has been accepted all over the world. But Muslims are not yet ready to accept it wholeheartedly.

The reason for this is that, traditionally, Muslims have cherished the concept of pan-Islamism for several centuries. They believe that Muslims living all over the world are one nation. That is to say, the Muslims' traditional bent of mind caused them to regard the basis of nationhood as religion rather than homeland. This concept runs counter to the modern concept of the state, although Muslims in every country enter in their passports their nationality as being that of their country of residence.

Evidently their minds are confused in this regard. The reason again being that the scholars of modern times have not exercised Ijtihaad on the subject of nationhood, and have thus failed to give clear guidance to Muslims.

Events tell us that, through sheer force of circumstances Muslims all over the world are following in the footsteps of other nations. This state of affairs has led them to opt for a life of contradiction. They adopt something they consider unIslamic owing to practical compulsions. Their thinking and their actions are not in accord with one another.

It was the responsibility of Muslim religious scholars to exercise Ijtihaad and guide Muslims in solving these modern problems so that they might wholeheartedly adopt such values as they have already adopted by way of compulsion. This is the only way of extricating Muslims from the state of confusion and its grave consequences.

Since their minds are not clear in these matters they are able to take part in the modern world only in a limited fashion owing to worldly compulsions. This is why they are lagging behind all other nations in the race of progress.

Other nations in modern times are wholeheartedly advancing along the path of progress. But Muslims' participation is minimal because of their half-hearted approach. This is the sole reason for Muslims' backwardness in modern times.

Apart from lagging behind in the race of progress, they are also suffering from many socio-political and cultural problems at both national and international levels. For example, on the national level, Muslims living as a minority in non-Muslim countries are generally not considered 'loyal citizens', as the modern concept of nationhood and its resultant obligations have yet to be legitimised by the Islamic shariah authorities. Banking, interest, insurance and other forms of financial transaction still await the unanimous stamp of approval of the Muslim Ulama.

None of these problems and misconceptions can be removed without a wide acceptance of Ijtihaad throughout the Muslim world.

9. HUMAN RIGHTS IN ISLAM

> "O people! Behold, we have created *you* from a male and a female; and we have made *you* into tribes and sub-tribes, so that *you* may recognise one another. The most honourable among *you*, in the sight of God, is he who is the most righteous among *you*. God is All-Knowing, All-Aware. (49:13)

*R*IGHTS in Islam are divided into two categories. One concerns divine rights (*Huququllah*) and the other, human rights (*Huququl Ibad*). Though divine rights are superior to human rights, this difference is a matter of belief or doctrine and not a matter of action or practice.

In the practical sense, both the rights: divine and human are so interrelated that sometimes it becomes impossible to separate one from the other.

In fact, it is the observance of divine right that paves the way for the observance of human rights in the true sense of the word. For instance, the first and foremost divine right is Tawhid, that is, to declare the oneness of God, without associating anything with Him, as the Quran says:

> Say, "He is God, the One.
> He is self-sufficient
> He begets not, nor was He begotten."
>
> (112:1-3)

This belief of *Tawhid* helps man realise the fact that there is nothing superior to or greater than God. All creatures, including human beings, irrespective of their external differences, are equal in dignity as well as in responsibility before the one and only God. Anyone who abuses or humiliates or ridicules others abuses the Creator indirectly. Such commandments abound in the Quran and Hadith and show that divine rights and human rights are so interdependent that they become complementary to one another.

It is as if God will not accept our obeisance to Him if we do not fulfill the human rights prescribed in the Quran and Hadith.

For instance, the Prophet is reported to have said:

> "By God, he is not a believer,
> By God, he is not a believer,
> By God, he is not a believer."
> When asked by the companions,
> 'Who is he?',
> The Prophet replied,
> "He whose neighbour is not safe from his mischievous deeds."
>
> (Abu Dawud)

The differences between human beings seen as justifications for discrimination resulting in the violation of basic human rights are considered in the Quran as signs of God:

> "And among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the diversity of your tongues and colours. In that surely are signs for those who possess knowledge. (30:22)

All the differences of race, community or tribe (49:13) are just for mutual introduction (*Ta'aruf*) and not for discrimination. The differences of race, community or tribe are not meant for discrimination against one another. They exist rather for the purpose of knowing and appreciating one another.

It is astonishing to note that the Quran had declared fifteen hundred years ago the biological unity of human beings, a fact which was scientifically established only during the sixties of the 20th century (Domenique Perri, *Building Peace*)

The fifth chapter of the Quran begins with this proclamation:

> 'O mankind, be conscious of your Sustainer, who has created you out of a single living soul and out of it created its mate. And out of the two spread on the earth a multitude of men and women... (4:1)

It was the realisation of this biological unity of the whole of mankind that made the Prophet say in his night prayers:

> "O God, I bear witness that all human beings are brothers." (Nasai)

In illustration of this fact, it was recorded that one day the Prophet saw a funeral procession passing through a street in

Madinah. He stood up in deference. When he was told by his companions that the deceased person was a Jew, not a Muslim, the Prophet said: Was he not a human being? (*Sahih* al-Bukhari)

Human life in Islam is held in such high esteem that the killing of a single human being is considered equivalent to the assassination of the whole of mankind. And the protection of a single human life is equivalent to the protection of the whole of mankind. It is so stated in the Quran with reference to the murder of Abel by his elder brother Cain, this being the first violation of human rights in human history. (5:27-32)

Some scholars claim that Islam does not have any provision for human rights in the modern sense, since it is theocentric, and therefore God is regarded as the starting point of all thought and action. On the contrary, the modern concept of human rights is anthropocentric, wherein man forms the centre of everything. However, a thorough analysis shows that this view is based on a misconception. Man's primary duty in Islam consists of obeying God wholeheartedly and unconditionally. All other rights, including human rights, automatically stem from this primary duty towards God.

We can say that, without this theocentric perspective, neither can the fulfillment of human rights be ensured nor their violation be avoided. The preamble of the UN Charter of Human Rights (UDHR) calls on all member nations to strive to construct a new world order, on a sounder basis, 'one in which the recognition of the inherent dignity and the equal inalienable rights of all the

members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world. (See for the full text of UDHR: EB X/1049)

It would be difficult to say that the UN or any other national or international body or authority has actually established the required world order on a sound basis. But in Islam as stated earlier, the doctrine of *Tawhid* and unconditional obedience to God provide the most powerful incentive for the observance of human rights and the strongest deterrence as such against their violation.

SOME COMPARATIVE EXAMPLES

Muslim scholars have thoroughly studied the topic of human rights. For details the readers may refer to the following books—1. *Human Rights in Islam* by Muhammad Zafarullah Khan. 2. *Islam and Human Rights* by A.E. Mayer. 3. *Human Rights in Islam* by Dr. Parveen Shaukat.

However, it would be better to give here some references from the Quran, Hadith and Islamic history. This may show us a clearer picture of human rights in the Islamic Shariah, both in theory and in practice.

1. FREEDOM OF RELIGION:

Religious freedom is the basic human right whose violation has caused conflicts, wars and bloodshed in both ancient and modern societies. The Quran, therefore, has declared for the first time in

human history, that 'there shall be no coercion in matters of religion.' (2:256). In view of this prohibition of coercion (*Ikrah*), all Islamic jurists (*Fuqaha*) without any exception, hold that forcible conversion is under all circumstances null and void. Any attempt to coerce a non-believer to accept Islam is a grievous sin, (*Ahkam al-Quran*, al-Jassas). According to this principle of 'non-coercion', it is not permissible to exploit or manipulate personal weaknesses or calamities (e.g. poverty, sickness, famine, etc.) for religious conversion. That is why old and downtrodden non-Muslims were exempted from taxes and given all monetary support by the Islamic state without ever being asked to embrace Islam just for the advantages it would give them.

Once a Jewish widow came to the Caliph Umar asking for some financial aid. Umar tried to persuade her to accept Islam. He promised to take care of all her needs if she embraced Islam. But the lady refused. Umar then gave her more than she had asked for. When she departed, Umar raised his hands towards heaven and said:

> "O God, bear witness that I have not exercised any coercion on this lady."
> (*Tarikh Umar ibn Khattab*, Ibn al-Jawzi)

2. JUSTICE AND EQUALITY BEFORE THE LAW:

According to the Quran and Hadith, the establishment of justice is one of the most essential goals in the sending of the

prophets and in revealing the divine scriptures (57:25). The just are loved by God (60:8) while the unjust will face the fire of Hell (72:15).

The Prophet once observed:

> "God does not bless a community in which the weak cannot take from the strong what is rightfully theirs without fear of reprisal." (*Sunan,* Ibn Majah)

Deviation from the path of justice is not allowed, even when it concerns one's opponent or enemy (5:8). The ruler and the ruled, the rich and the poor, black and white, should be treated equally before law, without any discrimination or distinction of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political affiliation, birth or other status. The following two incidents illustrate how strictly this ideal was religiously maintained in the early phase of Islam in accordance with Islamic doctrines and commandments.

A woman by the name of Fatimah, belonging to the Banu Makhzum tribe, once committed a theft. Her kinsfolk, fearing that her hand would be amputated, sent Usamah ibn Zayd to intercede with the Prophet on her behalf. When the Prophet heard this pre-planned intercession, signs of anger appeared on his face.

"Are you trying to sway me as to the limits laid down by God?" he asked. Usamah ibn Zayd immediately admitted his mistake and begged the Prophet to pray on his behalf for forgiveness. The Prophet then delivered a sermon to those assembled there saying:

"Communities of old came to grief and destruction because of the disparity and leniency shown to those in high positions when they committed such an offence. On the contrary, any offender of humble origin or lowly status in society had harsh punishment meted out to him. By God, if my own daughter Fatimah were to steal, I would have her hand cut off." (Al-Bukhari, Muslim)

3. FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND DISSENT:

The principle of non-coercion mentioned above has not been confined to religious freedom alone. Rather, it has been extensively elaborated upon and widely applied to all social, cultural, and political spheres of society. This has led to the development of a new culture in which individuals enjoy freedom of expression, dissent and criticism without any fear or restriction. Two examples may suffice to explain to what extent this essential human right was observed in earlier Muslim societies.

Once the Caliph Umar came to a well of the Banu Harithah where he met an outspoken person named Muhammad ibn Maslama. "How do you find me?" he asked Muhammad, "By God, I find you just as I would like you to be and just as it would please any well-wisher to see you. You are good at accumulating money, I see, but you keep your hands clean of it yourself, distributing it equitably to others." "But," went on Muhammad ibn Maslama, "If you adopt a crooked course, we will straighten you, just as we

straighten swords by placing them in a vice." At these aggressively critical words, Umar, the second Muslim Caliph, exclaimed:

> "Praise be to God, who has put me among a people who will straighten me when I become crooked." (*Kanz al-Ummal*)

When Muslims at Madinah, with their increasing affluence, began to settle huge dowers (*mahr*) on their daughters, Umar, in his capacity as caliph, ordered that no one should demand or pay a dower that exceeded four hundred dirhams, and that anything in excess of this amount would be confiscated and deposited in the public treasury (*Baitul-Mal*).

After the proclamation of this ordinance, when he came down from the pulpit, a tall, flat-nosed old woman stood up and confidently said:

> 'The Quran has set no restrictions on this matter: Umar has no right to set an upper limit to the dowers."

To back up her contention, she loudly recited this verse of the Quran:

> "If you decide to take one wife in place of another, do not take back from her the dower you have given her, even if it be a talent of gold.' (4:20).

Umar's immediate reaction on hearing this was to say:

> "A woman has quarrelled with Umar and has bested him."

According to another account, Umar said:

> "May God, forgive me, everyone knows better than Umar., even this old lady." (Tirmidhi/Ahmad)

With the advent of Islam in the seventh century, however, it was declared for the benefit of mankind that all greatness was the exclusive prerogative of God, and that in the eyes of God, all human beings were equal. The Prophet Muhammad declared not once, but on many occasions that all were alike, all were brothers.

"The Prophet not only stated the truth but also made it a reality by bringing about a total revolution based on the idea of human equality. On achieving political domination in Arabia, he was able to put this theory into practice in his capacity as ruler of a state. In this way, Islam put an end to discrimination between human beings on the basis of race, colour, status, etc. People were assigned a high or low status according to their moral worth."

(*Islam, the Creator of the Modern Age*, Maulana Wahiduddin Khan)

10. THE CONCEPT OF SOCIAL WELFARE IN ISLAM

ALL human beings, according to Islam, have been created by one and the same God, and for this reason they belong to one great brotherhood. All being descendants of the same progenitors, they should naturally be each other's well-wishers and should willingly come to one another's assistance, like the members of the same large family. Charity, an important way of bringing justice to society, has been preached by every religion of the world. And justice, being the essence of religion, Islam has made charity obligatory and binding upon all those who embrace the faith, laying the greatest emphasis on the support of the needy and destitute members of society. It is thus a sacred duty of the affluent to give part of their wealth to fulfill the needs of the deprived members of the community.

A society can flourish only when its members do not spend all their wealth on the satisfaction of their own desires, but reserve a portion of it for, relatives, neighbours, the poor and the needy. As the saying goes: Charity begins at home. A true believer is thus always prepared, after meeting the needs of his family, to assist other people in need of his help.

Charity in its broadest sense has been called *sadaqah* in Islam. Such great importance is attached to charity that the month of Ramadan has been fixed for individuals to be trained in the practice of charity. It has therefore been made into an institution in order to

give it permanence and regularity. The law of *zakah, i.e.* to take from the wealthy and give to the poor, rotates wealth in such a way as to balance social inequality. The required annual contribution to public welfare amounts to two and a half percent of one's income. The rate of zakah on other types of wealth, such as agricultural produce and jewellery is higher. Islamic law empowers the Islamic State or Community to collect the zakah, and to keep a separate account of it. Zakah funds must be spent on the eight categories specified in the Qur'an (2:177) namely, the poor and the destitute, the bankrupt, captives, collectors of zakah and in the cause of God. The last category allows these funds to be used for the social welfare of the community—for the education of the people, for public works, and for any other need of the Muslim community.

There are two forms of charity in Islam— obligatory and voluntary, which are respectively called *zakah* and *sadaqah*. Zakah, from the verb *zakah*, which signifies "to thrive," "to be wholesome," "to be pure," means purification. Giving up a portion of one's wealth, which is in excess of what one needs for one's own sustenance, is a purifying process, which legitimises the use of the remainder by the donor.

Deducting *zakah* from one's earning is a material acknowledgement of the fact that the actual giver is God. And since the giver is God, the recipient is duty-bound to spend it in His cause. In spirit, *zakah* is an act of worship, while in its external form, it is the carrying out of a social service. *Zakah* is thus not just the payment of a tax, but is of great religious significance. Its

importance is underscored by the fact that the Quran treats it on a par with *salah* (prayer).

There are such traditions as stress the importance of giving *sadaqah* in the holy month of *Ramadan*. Therefore, in this month of fasting, almost all those who can afford it, help poor people in one way or another.

The Qur'an frequently enjoins believers 'to perform the worship and pay the *zakat*' and even goes to the extent of saying that one cannot attain righteousness unless one spends out of one's wealth for the love of God. It also says:

> "By no means shall you attain righteousness unless you give of that which you love." (3:92)

Since charity is purely for the sake of God, it has value only if something good and valuable is given. It should be lawfully earned or acquired by the giver. It should include such things as are of use and value to others. So the test of charity lies in giving away not just things that we have discarded, but things that we greatly value. What God demands is unselfishness. It may be in any form—personal efforts, talents, skills, learning, property or possessions. Charity is, in the words of the Prophet, to place a thing in the palm of God. It is therefore, obvious that placing worthless things in the hand of God is a dishonour to Him.

But the demand of Islam that all its followers should spend their wealth freely on the common good of society cannot be met solely by the payment of the obligatory levy of *zakah*. There must

also be additional almsgiving on a voluntary basis. This is referred to in Islamic literature as *sadaqat-al-tatawwu* (the alms of spontaneity). The only difference between *sadaqah* and *zakah* is that the former is voluntary, while the latter is obligatory, and collected by the government as a compulsory levy. The rate and exemption limit (*Nisab*) for *zakah* are fixed, while the amount of other *sadaqah* is entirely dependent upon the will of the giver. The term *sadaqah*, as applied to alms, is an indication of the sincerity (*sidk*) of the almsgiver's religious belief.

The term *sadaqah* is also in certain cases used in a very broad sense to cover all kinds of charity, and should be interpreted according to the context. From the root *sadaqah*, "to speak the truth, to be true", it literally means righteousness. Ibn Arabi explains it as a "voluntary act of worship, a choice made by one's own free will. If this is not the case, then it is not voluntary *sadaqah*. For man makes it obligatory upon himself as God makes mercy obligatory upon Himself towards those who repent."

The scope of charity as defined in the Qur'an is so vast that even a poor person who has nothing tangible to give can offer *sadaqah* in the shape of a smile, or by offering a glass of water to a thirsty person, or by uttering a kindly word. Good conduct is frequently referred to in the hadith as *sadaqah*. Even planting something from which a human being, a bird or an animal may later eat also counts as *sadaqah*. In this extended sense, acts of loving kindness and even greeting one another with a cheerful expression are regarded as *sadaqah*. In short, every good deed is *sadaqah*.

According to a *hadith*, the Prophet observed: In one's wealth there is a due (to God and His men) besides *zakah*. Hadhrat Ali, the fourth caliph, has thus explained this *hadith*:

> "God has ordained that the rich are to pay out of their wealth to an extent sufficient for the needs of the poor, so that if they do not find food and clothing, or any other need remains to be fulfilled, it would be because the rich are not doing their duty, and for this God will take them to task on the Day of Judgement."

And according to Abdullah ibn Umar, the great religious scholar of the first phase of Islam:

> "If the *zakah* levy is insufficient to meet the needs of the poor, then it is the duty of the rich of every town to put the poor on their feet."

The Qur'an, in fact, refers to the *haq*, i.e. the right of the poor to be given assistance; so that what the wealthy man is asked to give is not just charity, but that which as a matter of right should come back to the poor.

There are many verses in the Qur'an and many traditions of the Prophet, which make it quite, clear that there is a due besides *zakah*, and that even when the wealthy have paid this tax, they have still not fully discharged their duties. Abu Dhar Ghifari, one of the Prophet's companions, reported that the Prophet, while sitting in the shade of the Kabah wall, said: "They are the losers." Abu Dhar enquired: "Who are they, O Messenger of God?"

The Prophet replied: "Those who pile up heaps of wealth and (pointing in all directions with his hands) do not spend like this and this and this." (Bukhari and Muslim)

Since *zakah* and *sadaqah* are not only moral obligations to society, but acts performed by believers to seek God's pleasure, a high standard is set for the manner of their accomplishment. Abdullah Yusuf Ali writes of charity in his commentary on the Qur'an:

(l) "It must be in the way of God.

(2) No reward must be expected for it in this world.

(3) It must not be followed by references to or reminders of the acts of charity.

(4) Still less should any annoyance or injury be caused to the recipient, e.g. by boasting that the giver relieved the person in his hour of need."

Thus the spirit of kindness and well-wishing is the essence of charity. The giver is not to expect any reward from the recipient, as there awaits for him an abundant reward from God—material, moral and spiritual—whatever God thinks it best to confer upon His servant.

The Qur'an, in verse 264 of chapter 2, admonishes us not to spend "to be seen of men." This is false charity. Spending with this motive is worse than not spending at all. In verse 265, God gives us a beautiful parable to illustrate what true charity is like. It is like

a field with good soil in an elevated position. It catches good showers of rain and the moisture penetrates the soil. With these favourable conditions, its output increases enormously. Similarly, a man of true charity is spiritually healthy. He is best placed to attract God's bounties. The Qur'an goes on to give four parables (verses 261-266), which explain the truly spiritual nature of charity and how it bears on the whole of our lives.

Yet, there are some people who think that acts of charity would ruin them. Abdullah Yusuf Ali comments on such doubts: "No kind or generous act ever ruined one." And we have never heard of anyone who, due to his generosity to good causes, has been impoverished. This is because the generous alms-giver has God's promise that He will shower him with greater bounties. (2:268) On the other hand, false generosity, that is, extravagant expenditure for show or self-indulgence can and does lead people to ruin. Verse 271 of the second chapter of the Qur'an makes the point that publicity should never be the motive for an act of charity. We must remember that we can seek God's pleasure only if our motives are pure.

In verse 273, the Qur'an states, "Charity is for those in need." This is a general condition to help people in need whether they are good or bad, on the right path or not, Muslims or non-Muslims. We are not supposed to sit in judgement on these matters. It is worth reiterating here that the chief motive in charity should be God's pleasure and our own spiritual good. This verse was revealed in the first instance in Madinah, but is of general

application. The concept of charity in Islam is thus linked with justice, and is not limited to the redressed of grievances. It implies, apart from the removal of handicaps, the recognition of the right that every human being has to attain the fullness of life.

Inspired by the traditions of the Prophet, the spirit of helping others to earn God's pleasure has been best reflected in Muslim society in the field of education. Following the dictum: "The greatest charity is for a Muslim to learn something and then teach it to others" (Ahmad). Generation after generation, Muslims in large numbers have devoted themselves to the enlightenment of others in the field of education. They did this individually and also by establishing *maktabs* and *madrasas*, that is primary schools and colleges. These educational institutions, set up in the house of the teacher or in separate buildings, generally made no charges for instruction. Wealthy people helped in the running of these *madrasas*, not only through *zakah* but also by making them endowments (*waqf*) of their properties, the income from which met the needs of these schools. Orphans and poor people were given stipends in addition to boarding and lodging.

Waqf is a permanent form of charity, which is called *sadaqah jariah*. It covers, in addition to giving education to the needy, such good works as helping someone to recover from some disease by monetary assistance; looking after orphans and the destitute, and giving scholarships to students. This being an institution is the reason for so many centres of social welfare having continued to

exist among the Muslim community. However, there are no statistical records of the work of individuals in this field.

Inspired by the verses of the Qur'an and the traditions and practices of the Prophet and his companions, the giving of *sadaqah* to individuals or institutions remains a widespread practice among Muslims. The Prophet, the most generous of men, used to give with his own hand. When asked for anything, he never refused. If he had nothing to give, he would borrow from one of his companions and repay him later.

The Prophet's wives were also renowned for their almsgiving. Of them, Zaynab bint Jahsh was the most generous. The Prophet used to call her "the longest in arm". She was also known, on account of her almsgiving, as the "mother of the poor." Whenever anyone uttered any words of blessing for her, she would return the blessing along with some alms. Then we have the shining examples of generosity set by the pious caliphs. Once when the Prophet urged them to give *sadaqah*, Umar ibn al-Khattab brought the half of what he owned, only to discover that he had once again been outdone by Abu Bakr who had given away all that he possessed.

There is a very interesting example of the generosity of Uthman, the third Caliph. During the Caliphate of Abu Bakr, people were in great distress due to a drought. The Caliph told them to remain patient, for God would soon relieve them. Before long, Usman's caravan arrived with its merchandise from Syria. There were one thousand camels in it, all of them loaded with wheat and foodstuffs from Syria. When the news got around

Madinah, all the great traders of Madinah, rapidly converged on Usman's house. When he emerged to meet them, they expressed their urgent desire to purchase the foodstuffs, so that they could pass them to those who needed them in Madinah.

Ushering them inside, he asked them how much profit they were prepared to give him on this merchandise. "Twelve *dirhams* on every ten dirhams worth," they replied. "But I can get a better price," said Uthman. "Then we'll give you fourteen," Uthman again said that he could get a better price, whereupon they put their price up to fifteen dirhams. But, Uthman stood firm. Bewildered by his attitude, they asked him, who could give him a better price, considering that all of the merchants of Madinah were already assembled there. "I can get ten dirhams for every dirham's worth," he told them, then asked them if any one of them could give a better price than that. No one spoke up. Then, Uthman recited the verse of the Qur'an, which says that those who do good will be rewarded ten-fold (6:160). He explained to them that he intended to give away all the wheat and other foodstuffs to the needy people of Madinah.

According to the teachings of Islam, the giving of *sadaqah* serves a number of functions. *Sadaqah*, first and foremost acts as expiation for sins. Believers are asked to give sadaqah immediately following any transgression. Voluntary almsgiving can also compensate for any shortcoming in the past payment of *zakah*. *Sadaqah* also gives protection against all kinds of evils, wards off affliction in this world, questioning in the grave, and punishment on

Judgement Day. It is, therefore, recommended to give *sadaqah*, by night and by day, in secret and in public to seek God's pleasure (2:274). The constant giving of little is said to please God more than the occasional giving of much. *Sadaqah* is also a means of moral edification. It purifies the soul of the evil of avarice, and is a reflection of the generosity of God the All-Giving.

We conclude with a hadith, which sums up the essence of charity:

> "Every good act is charity. Your smiling to your brother is charity; an exhortation of your fellow men to virtuous deeds is equal to almsgiving; your putting a wanderer on the right road is charity; your assisting the blind is charity; your removing stones, and thorns, and other obstructions from the road is charity; your giving water to the thirsty is charity. A man's true wealth as regards the Hereafter is the good he does in this world to his fellowmen. When he dies people will ask, What property has he left behind him?" But the angels will ask: "What good deeds has he sent before him?"

11. THE CONCEPT OF SPIRITUALITY IN ISLAM

SPIRITUALITY as a philosophy has a long history of five thousand years. In ancient Greece there were great philosophers like Plato and Aristotle whose thinking was spiritual in character. According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica, spiritualism is the philosophy of higher reality, which has been defined by different philosophers in different words such as, "immaterial reality," "a universal mind," "a supreme being," "spiritual cosmic force," "infinite personal God," etc.

Spirituality, being a subjective discipline, it cannot be described in objective terms. Every person is composed of two things—body and spirit. The body is related to objective science while the spirit is related to subjective science.

There are two different concepts of spirituality: God-oriented spirituality which is based on the concept of God Almighty, and man-oriented spirituality, which is based on man's soul itself being the treasure-house of spirituality. As for the former concept spirituality results in God-realisation while in the latter, spirituality results from self-realisation.

The concept of self-realisation is based on the assumption that the treasure of spirituality exists within man himself. And through meditation man can peep into his inner self and discover

spirituality. This concept has been explained by Acharya Rajneesh in his book, *"Kundalini Andar Base."* However this concept of man-oriented spirituality called "indwelling God" by Pandu Rang Shashtri, founder of the Swadhyaye Movement, is not corroborated by Islam. According to Islam man has no such spiritual treasure house existing independently. For man is a taker-creature. He receives everything from his Creator.

The concept of spirituality in Islam is based on the principle of God-realisation. God is the treasure house of all virtues. And when man's contact with God is established, in the world of his feelings, at the psychological level, an unseen, inner revolution is brought about which is called spirituality. In this matter the relationship between God and man can be likened to an electric wire and the power house. When the wire is connected to the power house, electricity is produced, and the place is lit up. In this way, light is the result of the wire's connection to the power house of God.

Human nature is like an inflammable element. When an inflammable element like petrol comes near fire, it is ignited. Similarly, human nature is awakened when it comes in contact with God.

This finds expression in the Quran in these words:

> Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth. The metaphor of His light is that of a niche in which there is a lamp, the lamp inside a glass, the glass like a brilliant star, lit by a blessed tree, an olive, neither of the east

> nor of the west, whose oil would well-nigh glow forth even though fire did not touch it. Light upon light! Allah guides to His light whom He wills. And Allah sets forth parables to men, and Allah has knowledge of all things. (24:35)

This is a compound simile. 'Light' here means the guidance of Almighty, 'niche' means the human heart and 'lamp' denotes the capability to receive divine inspiration. Glass and oil elaborate upon this receptivity.

'Glass' shows that this receptivity has been lodged in the human heart, protected from outside influences, and clear oil indicates that this receptivity is very strong and is eagerly waiting to receive inspiration.

This verse makes it clear that, on the one hand, is God, the source of inspiration, and on the other, is the consciousness of spirituality (God-consciousness) with which man is born. In this way when these two things come together, Islamic spirituality comes into existence. This is indeed another name for the awakening of God-consciousness. When it reaches its highest stage the believer's realisation of God comes to that point where he begins to feel consciously in his worship that he is seeing God and that if he is not seeing God, God is seeing him. If the first type of experience is called direct spiritual experience, the second-type may be termed indirect spiritual experience.

As the Quran tells us, “Prostrate yourself and draw near.” (96:19) For God is always close to us—closer than the life blood in the jugular vein (50:16). By total surrender to God, the soul can realise nearness to God.

Similarly, according to this hadith, ‘Worship God as if you are seeing him’ (*Sahih* Al-Bukhari) when man engages himself in true devotion, he is linked with God at a sensory or psychological level. He comes close to God. Through an invisible cord he comes in contact with God, God’s light passes through him. His entire existence comes to be pervaded by this indescribable feeling, which is called spiritual experience. This is called *Rabbaniat* in the Quran (Be people of the Lord 3:79). *Rabbani* means one whose thinking, and whose actions are God-oriented, who has placed God at the centre of his attention. When an individual attains spirituality, his state becomes like a lamp lit all of a sudden. He undergoes spiritual experiences. His heart becomes an ocean of spiritual waves. He appears to live in this world, but he has found another far superior world for himself.

These spiritual experiences cannot be explained in words. Everything in the universe seems to convey to him a divine message. The leaves of the tree become a thrilling experience. A waft of air gives him a message of truth. He can hear divine music in the waves of the river and the chirping of the birds.

Due to his high state of receptivity, he reaches the stage where the wavelength of God and man becomes one. And he is enabled,

in the words of the Prophet: "to see with God's eye, to speak with God's tongue, to walk with God's foot, to hear with the ear of God."

Then all limitations vanish and his day and night are spent in God's neighbourhood. All this can be felt, not described in words. This can be explained with the example of a child who has limitless love for his mother. He knows it himself in the full sense but he cannot fully describe it in words. The same is true of spirituality.

When a person is linked with the source of spirituality, he undergoes such spiritual experiences as he himself fully understands, but has difficulty in conveying to others. He may describe some external signs but he cannot describe inner reality.

Although it is difficult to describe the inner reality of spirituality, its method of attainment can be described to a certain extent and followed by others.

1. First of all man has to free his mind from confusion. It is difficult for a confused mind to undergo spiritual experiences. The basic reason for confused thinking is that man is not able to differentiate between the real and the superficial, the relevant and the irrelevant, rational thinking and superstition, logical and illogical statements.

   One who thinks thus will always remain in a state of mental confusion. He will never be able to find the straight path. As a result, his spiritual journey will never be started.

2. On the path of spirituality one cannot be one's own guide. And one certainly needs a guide. This guide is the Quran. It is an authentic, and carefully preserved book of God. That is why the Quran can be trusted as a guide by the spiritual traveller. After making the Quran one's guide, one can set one's spiritual journey on the right track.

3. This spiritual journey demands a change in lifestyle. This lifestyle for a spiritual traveller may be put briefly in these words: 'Simple living and high thinking.' Simple living means limiting one's worldly requirements to the minimum, assiduously avoiding comfort and luxury. That is why the Sufis used to wear coarse clothes as a symbol of the simple life. It helps the traveller in his spiritual journey. High thinking means that his thoughts are not embroiled in material things. By engaging one's mind in higher realities, one becomes a recipient of divine inspiration. This inspiration of divine light comes to his mind uninterruptedly, igniting his whole existence.

4. The Quran attaches great importance to reflection and serious thought. There are a number of verses in the Quran that indicate that innumerable signs of God are extant in the heavens and the earth. The observance of God's signs is the greatest source of spirituality.

Spirituality called *Rabbaniat* in the Quran, involves focussing the mind on higher, non-material realities. Materialism is the opposite, indeed, the anathema of spirituality. For attaining spiritual states one has to rise above material things, and focus his

attention on non-material things. Those who succeed in this are the spiritual or godly servants of God. As the Quran says:

> "Be godly servants of God." (3:79).

The truly spiritual person does not enjoy material comforts and luxuries. He feels no desire to acquire them. They have no attraction for him. For he is engrossed in the higher realities of spiritual life. This spiritual experience that comes to him from reflecting upon the signs of God is far superior to what one experiences in leading a worldly life. The greatest source of pleasure for him is the remembrance of God. It is this reality, which finds expression in this verse of the Quran:

> "It is only in the remembrance of God that hearts are comforted." (13:28)

Here comfort means peace of mind that stems from God Almighty. For, true and lasting comfort can be achieved only through the Perfect Being. One who discovers the secret of living on an elevated plane of spirituality, has discovered a life of limitlessness. Thus if materialism is to live a life of limitations, spirituality is to live in limitlessness.

We learn from the Quran that the universe has been fashioned by God in a way that it may become a source of spiritual inspiration for man. According to the Qur'an, it is the quality of *Tawassum* (15:75) that enables one to find inspiration in the universe. *Tawassum* is the ability to understand the signs of nature. That is, to observe the phenomena of the universe in order to draw lessons from them and receive spiritual nourishment from the physical events.

That is to say, a truly religious person is able to convert physical events into spiritual lessons. He derives spiritual nourishment from material things. The Quran has described how godly people continuously derive such sustenance from their environment, thus maintaining their intellectual and spiritual well being. This is elaborated upon in the Quran as follows:

> "In the creation of the heavens and the earth, and in the succession of night and day, there are signs for men of understanding; those that remember God when standing, sitting, and lying down, and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth (saying): 'Lord, You have not created these in vain. Glory be to You! Save us from the torment of the fire, Lord." (3:191)

Meditation is essential for developing our spirituality. Meditation is a high kind of contemplation. It is not a state of silence, but a deep kind of thinking process. It takes us from the seen world to the unseen, from darkness to light, from chaos to conviction, from limitation to limitlessness, from word to meaning. It is like a door through which one enters another world. In short, from the human world we reach the divine world.

The concept of meditation is based in Islam on two things, *at-tafakkur wat-tadabbur* (3:191, 4:82). Abu Darda was a senior companion of the Prophet. After his death a man came to his wife and asked her what was the most important form of worship performed by Abu Darda. She replied: He would spend the whole day thinking, thinking, thinking. According to this, Islamic meditation is a thinking process rather than the cessation of

intellectual activity. The Quran further tells us that this intellectual process has two different directions—*al-anfus* and *al-afaq*. *Al-anfus* literally means soul, that is, inner world; *afaq* literally means universe, that is, external world.

So when a believer sees the universe functioning in a perfect manner and he finds that all the events in this vast universe always proceed towards a meaningful result, he realises that man's life too must have a meaningful end. This makes him exclaim:

> O our Lord! You have not created all this without purpose. Glory be to you! Give us salvation in the life to come. (3:191)

Thus the universe is a manifestation of God's attributes. Hence, it is a source of spiritual nourishment for those who want to lead a divine life on earth. For them, the whole universe becomes an important means of reaching spiritual perfection. This spiritual development continues throughout their earthly life till a time comes when they attain that degree of spirituality which the Quran calls the 'Rabbani soul.' It is, souls such as these, who, in the life Hereafter, will inhabit paradise. Our most compassionate Lord will say:

> "Dwell in Paradise; you shall have no fear, nor shall you grieve." (7:49)

There is nothing mysterious about spirituality in Islam. It is rather the direct result of the kind of intellectual development that takes place when a believer ponders over the Creator and His

creation: he gains something in the process that may be termed spirituality. The source, therefore, of Islamic spirituality is observation and reflection, rather than any sort of mysterious exercises.

We learn from the Quran that in the very creation of the universe, the signs of God lie hidden all around us. One who has developed keen awareness when he reflects upon the things of the world is able to see the Creator in His creatures. The meaning of the creation of the Universe is laid bare before him. Ultimately, the universe becomes a permanent source of spiritual inspiration. He is continuously nourished by it during his worldly experience.

A believer is not supposed to shun his normal life in order to lead a life of observation and contemplation. Islam does not advocate withdrawing from the world. He has to live in this world and participate in its activities. What is desired from him is that while fulfilling all his duties, his heart should not be attached to worldly affairs. In this way he continues to gain spiritually.

Once a noted scientist said that only a prepared mind can make a scientific discovery. The same can be said of meditation. Here also a prepared soul alone can benefit from it. First of all *tazkia*, purification of the soul, has to be done through meditation. *Tazkia* aims at clearing one's heart of all kinds of negative sentiments, otherwise meditation will not work. There is a very interesting story which illustrates this point.

A milkman came to Gautam Buddha and asked him to give him *Gyan*, i.e. the realisation of truth. Gautam Buddha asked:

> "Would you like the milk to be put in an unclean container?"

The milkman said:

> "No. First of all we must clean the container and only then can we put the milk in it."

Gautam Buddha then said:

> "The same is true of realisation. Realisation can be put only in a clean container. First of all, you have to cleanse your heart and mind of all kinds of moral pollution. Only after this cleaning process will you be able to receive the truth."

The preparation during the pre-meditation period is very important. Anyone who desires to benefit from meditation will have to complete this pre-meditation course based on simple living and high thinking.

Jesus Christ once said:

> "Man cannot live by bread alone."

It means that physical food cannot provide complete fulfillment to man. It requires something more. This something more is spirituality. If food is needed for the nourishment of the body,

spirituality is needed for the nourishment of the soul. Both are required for the complete development of the human personality.

The human body is nourished by material food as is known to all of us. But the question arises as to how our soul receives its nourishment. The position of the soul can be likened to ore, and the position of spirituality can be likened to steel. Then how this ore is to be developed into spirituality? High thinking alone provides the answer to this question. This means thinking by rising above the mundane.

Meditation in Islam aims at bringing man closer to God. When man worships God, when he remembers Him, when his heart is turned towards Him with full concentration, when he makes a request or a plea, he establishes a rapport with his Maker. In the words of the Hadith, at that particular moment he comes to whisper with his Lord. He has the tangible feeling that he is pouring his heart out to God and that God in turn is answering his call.

When this communion is established between God and man, man can feel himself becoming imbued with a special kind of peace. His eyes are moist with tears. He starts receiving inspiration from God.

According to a *hadith* the Prophet Muhammad said the highest form of worship is to pray as if you were seeing God. We learn from this *hadith* the true sign of a superior form of worship. The true sign is for man to sense the presence of God during worship,

and feel that he has come close to God. That is when he can experience the refreshing, cooling effect of God's love and blessings for man. It is this feeling of closeness to God which is the highest form of spiritual experience. In chapter 96, the Quran says:

> "Do *Sajdah* (self-prostration) and come nearer to God." (96:19).

This *Sajdah* is the highest form of meditation. *Sajdah* is a form of unification of soul and body. According to this Quranic verse, *Sajdah* is the meeting point between God and man.

Sajdah is the sign of submission or surrender, for it is only in a state of submission or surrender that we can meet God Almighty. *Sajdah* is the final position of submission for acquiring a place very close to God.

12. THE RELEVANCE OF THE QURAN AND SUNNAH IN MODERN TIMES

EVERY religion revealed by God was, in its original form, eternal in character, just as the sun and the moon, the air and the water have a timeless character about them. Religion, in fact, is another name for eternal values, which in their nature are timeless and uniformly applicable in all situations and at all times.

A religion loses its relevance in succeeding ages when it is no longer preserved in its pristine form owing to human additions and interpolations. The Prophet of Islam who came in the 7th century, did not bring a new religion. His mission in fact was aimed at sifting the divinely revealed parts from the human additions which had swept into the ancient religions over the ages. The divine religion thus needed to be established in its original form. This reality has been expressed thus in the Quran:

> "I will show mercy to those who follow the Messenger, the unlettered Prophet, whom they find mentioned in the Torah and the Gospel, he enjoins on them good and forbids them evil, and makes lawful for them the good things and forbids them the bad things, and removes from them their burden and the shackles that were upon them. So those who shall believe in him, and honour and support him, and help him, and follow the light that has been sent down with him shall surely triumph." (7:157)

In this verse "burden" and "shackles" mean human addition. It is these human additions which make a religion irrelevant in succeeding ages. When a religion is purified of human additions, the question of irrelevance with the time automatically vanishes. Since Islam is free from all these additions, there is no possibility of Islam being irrelevant at any time or in any situation. In actual fact the commands given in Islam are totally timeless in character. As the Quran says:

> He has prescribed for you the religion which He enjoined on Noah, and which We have revealed to you, and which We enjoined on Ibrahim and Moses and Jesus, saying, 'Remain steadfast in obedience, and be not divided therein. (42:13)

In this verse the believers are commanded to follow those teachings of religion which were given to all prophets. These are: monotheism, sincerity, good virtues, character, and good deeds for the Hereafter. We learn from this verse that there are four parts of religious teachings sent down by God. One part encompasses all that is common to all the prophets sent to any part of the world. These teachings do not change with the changing times. These are the basic essence of religion. If we have to follow this real part of religion, the question of relevance or irrelevance does not arise, whatever the age. For its tenets are based on eternal values.

Another part of God's religion covers Shariah (Law) and Minhaj (Method) (see the Quran, 5:48). In this second part of the teachings some concessions had to be made according to the age

and situation in which the teachings were revealed. That is why the prophets were given different Shariah at different times.

In the above verse, Shariah means detailed law and Minhaj means its method. Since these two things relate very much to circumstances, they change with the changing situations. For instance, the principle of marriage between Adam's sons and daughters were different from the principles given to other prophets. Similarly, the respective political methods followed by Yusuf (Joseph) and Musa were different from one another. This difference was due to the difference in time and circumstances.

If we look at the teachings of Islam from this angle, we shall find that there is no conflict between these teachings and the demands of modern times and that Islam is practicable in the modern age in the full sense of the word.

The real and basic demand of Islam is that man should believe in one God. He should worship Him alone. He should embody truth, honesty, justice and other moral values. In short, within his own private sphere, he should fully obey God. Obviously, these teachings of Islam do not clash with the demands of modern times, which are equally practicable today.

Another part of Islam pertains to social laws. For instance, deterrent punishments. These kinds of laws similarly do not clash with the demands of modern times. For commandments such as these do not mean that Muslims should start implementing these commands in whatever circumstances they find themselves. On the

contrary, the prerequisite for the enforcement of these commands is that first of all they should be acceptable in society. As long as they remain unacceptable they will remain in abeyance.

Then there is Minhaj, that is, method. In this field also there is no clash between Islam and modern times. For, in social matters Islam will adopt whatever method is worthy of being implemented according to the spirit of the age. For instance, no attempt will be made to impose the system of caliphate by force in a country which has a democratic system. Rather by cooperating with the times, peaceful Islamic dawah work will be performed as demonstrated in the lives of the various prophets. In such matters, there is no single method which emerged among the prophets or the pious caliphs. We deduce an imporant principle from an incident in the life of the Prophet of Islam. A person named Musaylama rose in Yaman, who falsely claimed to be God's prophet and to have been appointed as co-prophet along with the Prophet Muhammad. Musaylama sent a two-member delegation to Madinah to meet the Prophet of Islam and ask him to acknowledge his prophethood. The Prophet asked the delegates what opinion they had about Musaylema regarding his claim to prophethood. They said that they believed in his claim. At this the Prophet of Islam replied that, had there been no rule in this world that envoys should not be harmed, he would have had both of them killed. (*Seerat* ibn Hisham).

From this incident in the life of the Prophet of Islam, we learn a very important principle of *shariah*. That is, if a principle is generally accepted, at the international level, then the relevant

Islamic principle will also be the same as that of other nations. This decision of the Prophet of Islam shows that in matters of age-old customs the law of the believers as well as of other nations would not be separate, provided the matter in hand did not pertain to some unlawful act, for instance, the eating of pork. It is obvious that if Islam followed this principle in international matters, then there would be no conflict or clash in the practical sense between Islam and other nations in respect of changing times.

One important teaching of Islam is that, with the exception of matters of worship and beliefs, no command is absolute so far as social matters are concerned. Commands can change with changes in place and time. The Shariah law can be changed as per the rule framed by our jurists. "Commands change with the change of time and place." This teaching establishes at the outset that in no circumstance we should clash with the times. Rather, in keeping with the demand of the times we are free to carve out our path. In such a situation there is no possibility of Islam ever appearing to be irrelevant with the change of time. Obviously, when we are not supposed to go against circumstances, how could Islam ever become irrelevant due to the changed situation.

From a study of the Prophet's life we may adduce the important congregational principle that Islam does not encourage us to clash with the prevailing political status quo but urges us instead to pursue our goal by accepting the status quo. This teaching solves the problem of Islam ever becoming irrelevant with the changing times. A system becomes irrelevant only when it is at

variance with the changing times. When there is no such clash, the question of irrelevance does not arise at all.

The guidance of the Prophet of Islam has been gathered together in books of traditions, one part of which is found in *Kitab al Fitan*. In these traditions Muslims have been commanded, in no uncertain terms, that in any circumstance and in any age when they find political corruption among the rulers, they must sedulously refrain from opting for a policy of confrontation with them. Totally avoiding political confrontation with them, they must continue working in non-controversial spheres, for instance, in the fields of education, dawah, economics, social work, etc. The aim of this teaching of the Prophet is to make Islam relevant at all times.

The actual target of Islam is the intellectual, spiritual and moral rectification of the individual. This task is wholly related to the sphere of individual freedom. Today the principle has been accepted all over the world that every individual should be granted full freedom in his own personal sphere. He is free to think and act as he likes. This is the actual sphere of Islamic action. And when in this sphere every individual is granted total freedom, no objection can be raised that Islam has lost its relevance in modern times.

Another sphere of human action is that which concerns social matters. This is the sphere in which confrontation takes place with others, raising the question of relevance and irrelevance. Islamic teaching for this sphere is action in accordance with circumstances.

If circumstances are not conducive for an action, we have to follow the path of persuasion and counselling, strictly adhering to peaceful means.

There are also certain matters where the teachings of Islam apparently go against the prevalent custom. For instance, the justification of wine, interest-based economy, deterrent punishment, different workplaces for men and women or secular democracy in place of the Khilafat, etc. The teachings of Islam in such matters are clearly different from the prevalent custom of modern times. And as we know, the majority today is not at the moment willing to accept the teaching of Islam in these matters.

This would appear to show that Islam has become irrelevant in modern times. But it is not right to draw this conclusion in haste. It is true that the teachings of Islam in social matters are different from the custom of the age. But this is a matter which pertains to ideological difference. Islam does not enjoin its followers to set about changing the status quo at the first instance, in order to replace it with the Islamic system. The teaching of Islam in this matter is to opt for the way of patience. That is, refraining completely from launching oneself on a collision course and rather communicating one's point of view in the language of persuasion. In this way an atmosphere can be created which is favourable to Islam and the relevance of Islam can be proved purely on a rational basis, so that it may find acceptance in due course.

In modern times there are two aspects to a religion becoming irrelevant, one ideological, another practical. Becoming irrelevant

from the practical point of view means that a religion gives such commands to its adherents as are impracticable from the point of view of the age factor. As mentioned above, no such command exists in Islam. In its practical aspects, Islam is a religion of adjustment, giving ample concession to circumstances. There is enough flexibility in Islam in this regard. That is why Islam could never become irrelevant, whatever the age, so far as practical matters are concerned.

When we look at this issue from the ideological point of view, we do find on certain occasions, that the demands of Islam and the demands of the age are diametrically opposed to one another. But as mentioned above, in matters of ideological differences the way of peaceful persuasion alone will be adopted. At all events, no practical initiative be taken, when the circumstances are unfavourable. In such a state of affairs, ideological difference can never create any problem in any age or in any situation.

One thing is worth remembering in this connection, and that concerns Ijtihaad. One role of Ijtihaad is that whenever any teaching of Islam appears to be going against the demands of the time, the religious scholars are duty-bound to strive by exercising Ijtihaad to seek a reapplication of the teachings of Islam to changing situations. Ijtihaad is in fact another name for seeking reapplication of Islamic teachings to the changing needs of the time. (See chapter on Ijtihaad).

Muslim scholars of modern times, feeling the need to exercise Ijtihaad have made an effort to reapply the principle of Islam in this

matter. For instance, on the Indian subcontinent Maulana Husain Ahmad Madani and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad said that since in modern times the nationality was linked with the homeland, Islam would also follow the same principle. That is to say, in whichever country Muslims lived, they would be regarded as co-patriots like other citizens. And they would not insist on a separate nationality for themselves.

The aim of Ijtihaad is that in all ages the gap between Islam and the age may continue to be filled. In no circumstance should the impression be formed that Islam has become irrelevant in the changed circumstances. It was due to the importance of this matter that the Prophet of Islam encouraged Muslims to continue the process of Ijtihaad, even at the risk of making mistakes. In no circumstance was the door of Ijtihaad to be closed.

The actual goal of Islam is to bring about an intellectual revolution among the people. Such a task is eternal in its nature. That is why along with eternal laws goes the principle of flexibility in Islam. Along with *azimah* (commands) Islam gives ample space for concessions and exemptions. Along with the observance of form Islam gives equal importance to the spirit.